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**Securitization (management) of minor differences
security and conflict in the South Caucasus during the late 1980s and early 1990s**

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Awarding institution:
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Securitization (Management) of Minor Differences¹

SECURITY AND CONFLICT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

DURING THE LATE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S

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¹ The title is adapted from Sigmund Freud's concept of '[narcissism] of small [minor] differences' as he describes relations between close neighbours (amongst nations) who ridicule each other as a kind of narcissism FREUD, S. 1929. Civilization and its Discontents. Aylesbury: Chrysoma Associates Limited.

Securitization (Management) of Minor Differences

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASSR – Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic

ASSR – Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic

Bolsheviks – Majority of the party

Committee - Karabakh Committee

Front - National Front of Azerbaijan

GSSR – Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic

Mensheviks – Minority of the party

NKAO – Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast

Revkom – Revolutionary Committee

RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic

Round Table – Round Table Independent Georgia

USSR – Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics

List of Newspapers and News Agencies

Avrora (Russian magazine)

Bakinskii Rabochii (Baku, ASSR)

Edinenie (Abkhaz newspaper published in Sokhumi)

Express Khronika (Moscow, USSR)

Guardian (London, UK)

Independent (London, UK)

ITAR TASS (Soviet News Agency)

Izvestia (Moscow, USSR)

Komunisti (Tbilisi, GSSR)

Komsomolskya Pravda (Moscow, USSR)

Literaturli Saqartvelo (Tbilisi, GSSR)

Newsweek (USA)

New York Review of Books (USA)

New York Times (USA)

Ogonek, (Moscow, USSR)

Pravda (Moscow, USSR)

Radio Free Europe /Radio Liberty (Prague, Czech Republic)

Reuters

Rustavi 2 (Tbilisi, Georgia)

Sobesednik (Moscow, USSR)

Times (London, UK)

Voice of America

Washington Post (USA)

Maps



Map 1: Map of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1993

Source: University of Texas Library, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection

last accessed 08/08/2019

< <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/nagorno-karabakh.gif> >

Azerbaijan S.S.R.



Map 2: Azerbaijan Map, 1990

Source: University of Texas Library, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection

last accessed 08/08/2019

< https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/azerbaijan_ssr.90.jpg >

South Ossetia Region



Map 4: South Ossetia

Source: University of Texas Library, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection

last accessed 08/08/2019

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f6/SouthOssetia region detailed map.JPG>



Map 5 : Georgia, 1993-94,

Source: Author's personal Archive

Abstract

The crisis that shook the realm of three South Caucasian former Soviet republics in the 1980s and early 1990s left many scholars and experts astounded. The conflicts escalated in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia almost simultaneously. This study aims to analyse the discourse of ethnic disputes as they have contributed to mobilisation.

The title is adapted from Sigmund Freud's concept of 'narcissism of minor differences' (1929). Freud argues that ethnicity was too minor an issue to justify bloodshed. His point is that ethnic differences do not constitute a valid reason for war and atrocities; it is, rather, a veil for prejudices and a camouflage for other factors. Hence, the study considers that ethnic differences were securitized, i.e. depicted as threats by certain political or military actors.

By examining the discursive dimension of the crisis, this thesis suggests that the meanings allocated to the nation and ethnic affiliations were instrumental in escalating the crisis. The study adopts the securitization framework and finds that political narratives have influenced the interpretation of ethnicity and enmity across the region *viz.* Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

1. Chapter One

Introduction, Context and Aim

1.1. General Introduction

The thesis focuses on the three conflicts that were the result of contested borders between the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in Georgia between the centre and two autonomous units: South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It will address the events of the late 1980s up until the early 1990s, a time of transformations and the establishment of state independence that shaped policies and politics across the region. The fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union paved the way to the independence of the individual units of the USSR, changing both the political and the societal landscapes. The end of the bi-polar world order *forced* new states to switch from a hierarchical order to an anarchical society, a profoundly new challenge that was marked by wars and conflicts across the area. The territorial claims had occupied the agenda in relations between the republican governments and their autonomous entities. Political or ethnical disputes in republics other than those of Armenia,

Azerbaijan, and Georgia were not as violent as in the South Caucasus (e.g. the issue over Crimea's status between Russia and Ukraine).

The decisions and approaches of policymakers in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia — the former republics of the USSR — prompt this project to examine the conflicts in the South Caucasus. This thesis will focus on three conflicts in one region: Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia — war-torn and disputed areas of the South Caucasus. The main idea of this research is to analyse and re-classify the rise of separatism in three *de-facto* states. How did the national movements shape the ideas and demands of autonomous entities as they mobilised the public along the ethnic lines? This research aims to understand the content of disputes that took the lives of tens of thousands of innocent citizens. General opinion about the war and conflict in the former Soviet Union tends towards primordial or great power game assumptions, an outlook mostly shared by the post-Soviet scholars, while the Western academia is more likely to explore the social constructivist dimensions of the conflicts (see Suny). This project aims to give voice to the constructivist approach and emphasize the discourses and verbal communications hidden behind the sequence of the events outlined above.

The argument is based on the assessment that securitization served as a last resort for the national movements and their allies to acquire legitimacy and embark on coercive and military actions. The collapse of the USSR revealed the shortcomings of a corrupt system, which failed to bring progressive social forces into politics. During major political shifts it is essential to acquire and develop “political consciousness”, which will itself lead to greater participation in the political system and acknowledgment of its demands; thus the political shift serves as a litmus test of

a system's adjustability (Huntington, 2006: 143). However, the break-up of the state represented a huge political about-turn within the strict Soviet hierarchical order. It was impossible to assure the continuity of the political process. Political groups in the USSR failed to adapt and were unreceptive to the new system (Huntington, 2006: 143). Hence it was impossible to sustain the normal process of interactions. As Samuel Huntington notes, power has a dual function — it can both expand and contract, and must be “concentrated and dispersed” (2006: 143). In other words, power is not a unilateral action, but a form of a reciprocal relationship. Yet power was neither contracted nor dispersed in the three states of the South Caucasus. Subsequently, the failure to communicate post-regime requirements caused the crisis that took place in the South Caucasus after the breakup of the USSR. The groups claiming power in Tbilisi, Baku and Yerevan structured their narrative along ethnic lines and forgot about the need to “contract” and “disperse” power. They thought that only the monopolisation of power and space was enough to govern effectively. The governments of all three countries disregarded and underestimated the significance of communication. Their policies fostered exclusiveness and rigidity (the inability to change). Nationalists in the republics were delusional about their own potential as well as their relative importance. For example, most nationalists in Tbilisi in 1989 thought that a nationwide strike could persuade Gorbachev to listen to their demands (Bogert, 1989). In 1989, *Newsweek* reported from southern Georgia that national minorities did not feel safe, as an Azeri resident of Bolnisi talked about Georgian and Azerbaijani gangs roaming and shooting at night; in the meantime, the opposition (or nationalists) were unable to deliver a reassuring message (Bogert, 1989). Willingness to listen to alternative arguments was absent, as nobody was ready to reconsider the positions and question their own reasoning

behind the rationale. This project will explore and analyse how the cultural and territorial claims of autonomous entities were dealt with in terms of language and subsequent actions.

As suggested from the title, the interpretation of the crises offered by this thesis is that an ethnic difference is not itself a cause of war and atrocities; it is, rather, a focal point for prejudices and a camouflage for other factors. But before it becomes an instrument, differences are “produced” (Derrida, 1982: 14). The difference is given a degree or a level of distinction. To a certain extent, this contrast is emphasized and imposed on a social level. All those people, in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia had previously co-existed despite the political and geographic boundaries drawn by the Soviet Union authorities. The Kremlin employed the practice of social/geographic engineering, that is, relocating people from one place to another or granting small chunks of cross-border provinces to neighbouring republics. Paula Garb describes how people in the North Caucasus and Abkhazia complained about artificial boundaries: “borders were drawn to separate us from each other. We almost forgot that we were related” (1998: 190). Garb notes that people understand that differences were imposed by the Soviet regime (in the North Caucasus in particular), but argues that the absence of “Pan-Caucasian” identity and alliance combined with wars in Abkhazia and Chechnya exacerbated nationalism further (1998: 199). Indeed, the ethnopolitical borders raised many issues that emphasized peoples’ ethnic background (see chapter 4). Another example of social engineering was the relocation of Georgian families from the Racha region to Abkhazia after the World War II. This relocation and the ethnic structure of the area later became a significant source of dilemma between governments in

Tbilisi and Sokhumi as the ethnic texture of Abkhazia became a cornerstone of disputes. Earlier, in the nineteenth century, the Tsarist Russian government had deported thousands of residents of Abkhazia to Turkey, thus inflicting a long-lasting national trauma (on the Muhajirs). Besides, the Armenian province of Nagorno-Karabakh was put under the administration of Azerbaijan in the 1920s, and the Georgian province of Saingilo was also given to Azerbaijan. It is notable that the Communists did amend the geographical boundaries of the region, establishing a common state, i.e. the USSR. At the same time, ethnic Azerbaijanis mainly inhabited the Georgian area of Marneuli. South Ossetia (Samachablo²) was mainly populated by Ossetians (North Caucasian people). Also, there was a significant Armenian population in the Southern Georgian province of Akhalkalaki. Subsequently, after the independence of the three countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), conflicts erupted in three spots: Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Meanwhile, neither Saingilo, nor Marneuli or Akhalkalaki experienced large-scale divisions.

One might ask what these three conflicts have in common apart from being geographical neighbours. The answer could lie in the structure and content of the narratives that helped to emphasize ethnic differences. Political entrepreneurs in all three republics followed very similar lines and exploited divisions built up during the years of the Communist regime. Statistical analysis shows that “cultural factors” were assigned importance across the twenty eight post-Communist countries after the collapse of the USSR (Horowitz, 2003: 26). This research project assumes that those cultural factors were constructed and shaped by national movements. Speaking of history, ethnicity and difference allowed the political entrepreneurs to

² An old name of the province, originating from the Princes Machabeli, who ruled the area.

employ similar stories of greatness and victimhood. Such practices have unequivocally helped to resurrect enmities that were first provoked by the Bolshevik rule and by policies employed in 1920s. Hence, to be able to understand the rationale of wars in the 1980s, one should examine the verbal material used to build a narrative of nationalism and ethnic superiority. One has to bear in mind how such ideas overtook other more rational ones, and brought the countries considered in this study to the brink of catastrophe. In other words, this project concerns the discourse of ethnic politics during the last years of the Soviet Union and how the political actors crafted the “othering” narrative. Focusing on the three former Soviet republics, one can recount narratives of division that exacerbated the enmity in those states. Looking into the commonalities across the Caucasian republics might offer a blueprint for studying the discourses of difference.

1.1.1. Context of the research

I grew up in Tbilisi in the late 1980s and 1990s and witnessed first-hand the impact of nationalist discourses on communities. Georgian society, which had five years earlier had applauded Tengiz Abuladze’s *Repentance* and Eldar Shengelaia’s *Blue Mountains*, was absorbed by narrow-minded ethnic nationalism, becoming an example of “incompetent authoritarianism” (Jones, 2013: 51).³ The reason behind the transformation of the public opinion in favour of nationalists was hidden and ignored by most of public and intelligentsia. Therefore, I found it fascinating to

³ Both films were famous for their anti-Soviet and anti-establishment outlook, Abuladze was awarded a Special Jury Prize at Cannes Film Festival in 1987. CANBY, V. 1987. Piatat Film Gets Top Prize At Cannes. *New York Times*, 20 May.

examine the discourse of divisions and define the line that separated ‘us’ from ‘them’ and how it happened that part of *us* had turned into the *others* almost overnight.

This research project was motivated by my observations and experience throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, when political polarization and ultra-nationalism swept away moderate opinions in Georgia (see Jones, 2013: 52-54). Living in this age of extremes had prompted questions in me about the polarization of a society and why radicalism had become acceptable. After spending almost a decade within British academia, I have identified a gap in academic literature concerning the region. Being both an insider and at the same time an outsider is an advantage that helps me to examine the series of events that precipitated the crises I am studying. The political narratives that were intrinsic parts of the conflicts and their escalation have previously been underestimated. It was after my MA graduate studies that I realised the significance of the discursive paradigm, which was largely an under-researched area in the South Caucasus. With an outsider’s lens, it is easier to notice those dramatic shifts that the hostile and radical discourse had caused in building post-Soviet relations between the member-republics of the “internationalist” country. It is the primary aim of this research to underline the words and performatives (see chapter 3) that changed the perception of “the other”. I trace the pretext of the armed conflict in political narratives featuring the glorious past, ethnic belonging and supremacy. As Michael Billig argues to have a national identity is the ability to own the ways of talking about nationhood (1995: 8). In a certain way, polarization was a matter of convenience and a classificatory device that one day became a “substitute of thinking”; differences became essentialised and were turned into facts (Herzfield, 1997: 165). As Miroslav Hroch explains, the

national movements were made up of a “new range of activists” who agitated on behalf of their compatriots to share the project of creating a nation-state (phase B); most of the movements succeeded, forming a mass movement (phase C) which then forced the emergence of the full social structure of the nation, thus creating political differences (1994: 5). Again as Billig observes, nationalism is banal in everyday life, but if the established routines break down, nationalism can become ‘hot’, i.e. politically charged and driven emotionally (1995: 43-44).

Therefore, building on observations and empirical data, this study intends to:

- Apply securitization theory to the context of three de-facto states; explore and study the implicit meanings of rules and practices that predated the turmoil.
- Examine the interactions between the former Soviet Republics (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) and de-facto entities (they had autonomous status at the time of conflict), and analyse how securitization was achieved, explain the socially-produced meaning that influenced regional security alignments, and to stress that geopolitical location was not a supreme guiding factor; nor were the ethnic differences of the highest priority, but the scope and interpretation of many distinct variables have co-acted and produced the crises.

This study will examine the depth and breadth of securitising tools and their role in triggering the bloodshed. For the purposes of this research, ‘securitising tools’ mean words and utterances, speeches and symbols, as well as historical narratives used to incite the conflicts (see Balzacq, 2011b). Bearing in mind the wars over territories and status in the South Caucasus in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is

legitimate to pose this question concerning the role and function of differences, security and otherness in the escalation of the situation. This research project will propose to understand the discourses of those years as practices and categories that became central to the escalation of conflicts and the maintenance of nationalism through the 'othering' of certain groups of population. Predominantly it is an attempt to explain the "metaconflict" over the nature of the conflict — to show the social struggle over the interpretation and definition of the actual violence (Brubaker, 2002: 174).

One might ask why Adjara is not included in the study, as it is a tiny autonomous region situated directly on the former Soviet–Turkish border. This thesis does not argue that autonomous status *per se* was the reason for the conflict in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, but rather the securitization of the narratives predisposed it. Adjara did not qualify for this particular study, because the divisive discourse did not refer to Adjarans. Although a large number of the population was Muslim, these were ethnic Georgians and therefore their 'Georgianess' trumped religious difference. This study focuses on instrumentalization of ethnicity, which did not take place in Adjara in 1980s. Besides Adjarans speak Georgian language, and Abkhaz or Ossetians have their own languages (Hamilton, 2014: 120-121). There was no negative ethnic stereotype with regard to Adjarans, hence there was no conflict over ethnic/national symbols as was the case in Nagorno-Karabakh for example. These were the "eliminary variables" that exclude Adjara from the study (Goertz, 2006: 187). In short, it is instructive to consider the selectivity of the differentiation process in the Soviet Union. As Mathijs Pelkmans argues, the Soviet authorities had "restructured" Adjaran autonomy and

its meaning: because the Adjara Autonomous SSR was not a pre-planned entity in the Soviet Union, it was a result of the compromise between the Turkish Republic and the USSR in 1921, which initially implied that full autonomy should be given to Adjara based on its “religious difference” (Pelkmans, 2006: 7). Yet it was unacceptable, in the atheist USSR, to define a unit by a religious criterion — thus Adjara started to “disappear” from Soviet statistics gradually through the 1930s (Pelkmans, 2006: 7). As Pelkmans notes, the Georgian Soviet Encyclopaedia, offers a very simple definition of Adjara autonomy compared to that of Abkhazia (2006: 5-7). Adjara was an economically flourishing region and its population was described as predominantly Georgian, being positioned “as a politically indivisible part” of Georgia (Pelkmans, 2006: 5). The very same encyclopaedia offered a quite different text about Abkhazian autonomy however, assigning importance to those “titular categories” that were instrumental for emphasizing the autonomous status (Pelkmans, 2006: 7). In other words, the Adjara ASSR was treated differently, despite its lack of enthusiasm about joining Georgia in 1918 (Hamilton, 2014: 114). Pelkmans argues that “discursive” and “political shifts” had shaped and defined the consequences of post-socialist religious dynamics (2006: 96). As the focus of this study is securitization, Adjara, despite its autonomous status, will not be addressed. The conditions of securitization were not met in the Adjara case, as when Abkhaz and Ossetians were merely ‘guests’ of Georgia, Adjara was ethnic Georgians practicing Islam. Adjara will not be used as a dependent variable because the criterion of case selection for this study is the discourse of securitization.

1.1.2. Political actors and intelligentsia

Another vital aspect for this study is the definition of intelligentsia and political actors. As it has been mentioned this study focuses on their speech acts, as they were active participants of social transformation. It is important to explain who these people were and why their language was significant during the collapse of the USSR. As it is further explained in forthcoming empirical chapters, the political entrepreneurs or actors were the members or activists of the national movements in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan: i.e. people who distrusted the Communist regime and, during the *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, became outspoken critics of the system. They consolidated nationalist sentiments among the public and became a force that demanded concessions from the Kremlin and later full independence. It must be noted that their political narrative had put an imprint on the relations between the republics and their smaller units: autonomies. Hence, these people merit closer examination and might aid in uncovering the reasons for conflicts.

Another group which is also addressed in this thesis are intellectuals, some of whom, later on, joined the independence movements and proved instrumental in supporting national self-determination in 1980s. One must bear in mind that some of the nationalist leaders were intellectuals and rebels at the same time. The empirical chapters provide more detailed description of this trend. Yet, before going into the details one must draw attention to the content that was attached to Soviet intelligentsia.

Notably, those intellectuals who had suffered intimidation and epistemic violence — and were successful representatives of the intelligentsia — somehow adjusted to the *Perestroika*, but others adhered to nationalist rhetoric. They became consumed by nationalistic ideas as they spoke of history and patriotism. They were

liberated from the shackles of the Soviet power in which they were used to be an “expression of the interests of the working class” (Sakwa, 1990: 72). Yet here one can question how they used Gorbachev’s trust when he urged the writers’ congress to support his vision and help him to “influence the people” (Sakwa, 1990: 72) and make a success out of the *Perestroika*.

Richard Sakwa notes that Gorbachev’s elevation of the intelligentsia indicated the change from conformity towards diversity of ideas (1990: 73). However, after the purges of the Stalin-era it was not easy to be sure that these influences would have been positive, and the intelligentsia could produce a meaningful impact that Gorbachev wished to see. Besides, in times of Brezhnev the USSR went through “intellectual stagnation” as there was no role permitted for critical and creative people in society (Sakwa, 1990: 73). Moreover, Stalin ensured he destroyed the finest minds and mostly vacated the space for “superfluous people”, leaving no room for people with distinct aptitudes in the country (1990: 73).

Gorbachev’s initiative to open up the country and vacate the space for free-thinking people did not go down smoothly. Despite his efforts to communicate with the members of the intelligentsia they began to split into different groups of “reformists” (Gorbachevites), “radicals” and “conservatives” (Sakwa, 1990: 75). Gorbachev perhaps wished to see them as moderate agents of change, ones who were able to abstain from radical demands and, at the same time, not argue that the *Perestroika* was leading the country toward destruction (Sakwa, 1990: 74). Yet, the intelligentsia were facing up to what they perceived to be “ethnized bureaucracy” and an underdeveloped institutional framework for political participation, which was able to reconcile the ethnic concerns animated by *Glasnost* (Snyder, 2000: 225).

In other words, intellectuals became another source of dilemma for Gorbachev and his reformist ideas. If there was progress in Moscow the situation was different in the South Caucasus. As Sakwa observes, the intelligentsia in the South Caucasus and the Baltic states took a different stance on *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* when they shifted attention to the nationalist sentiments (1990: 77). More precisely, the leading intellectuals in the Caucasus began to copy Baltic “popular fronts” movements, which meant facilitating national movements and supporting the organization of political parties (Snyder, 2000: 225). This thesis brings attention to the decisions of the intellectuals in the three republics, which varied significantly depending on local settings and political constellations (2000: 226). It should be noted that intellectuals re-interpreted *Glasnost* and used it to boost nationalist sentiments. As mentioned earlier, these were the individuals who suffered censorship and were victims of unfair repression. The voices of intellectuals had influenced the audiences on all sides of the argument, and, as Czeslaw Milosz notes, the dialectician emerges as victor in the battle of arguments, as he uses affective language and listeners are defenceless even if they raise questions (1981: 14). Therefore, individuals who were bred by the repressive regime were now commissioned with a mission to transform that very system. Despite the efforts made by intellectuals many of them pursued different agendas that increased the divide and perhaps *Glasnost* made them even more visible.

Sakwa argues that *Glasnost* had one big achievement: the reconstruction of free-thinking (Sakwa, 1990: 81). Yet, returning to the point raised by Milosz, one can understand why the part of intelligentsia was instrumental in supporting nationalist sentiments. Perhaps one has to bear in mind that tyranny begins not with tyrants,

but rather its source is the language of tyranny, which derives from philosophy (Lilla, 2001: 178). In other words, intellectuals do have a say in the outcome of political discourse. Their words and ideas did shape the understanding of *Perestroika*, and, hence, their comments and articles influenced the discourse of Soviet change.

1.1.3. Aim and objectives

The broad aim of this study is to analyse the discursive paradigm of the conflicts in the South Caucasus. It will demonstrate the problem through the securitization framework, and emphasize how the protagonists and political actors shaped and directed the discourse. Securitization theory is a toolkit that reflects the political reality of the time. Just as a photo is a reflection that depends on the amount of light and speed transmitted through the camera, the social world is displayed through a scientific lens reflecting the interaction of structure and agency. Photographers draw the world with light, whereas social scientists opt for their own trajectory of observation, and the size of their lens. A photographer always adjusts the light and speed of the camera, making an objective picture a product of *adjustment*. This study will prioritise a qualitative methodology based on empirical data, on words uttered and decisions made. Delving below the divisions and the discourse of conflicts allows the reader to reconsider the content and style of slogans that governed communities.

For the purpose of the study this research project will focus on speeches, articles, open letters and declarations that surrounded the crises in 1980s. It will analyse ideas and viewpoints of political leaders and members of the intelligentsia who were instrumental in forming the discourse of the post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The data examined in the study depicts the narratives of

people in or close to power who were the main enunciators and affected the context of the conflicts. It does not focus on particular sources or media, rather the data includes different outlets or video footage that represent the discourse of nationalists. Decisions are thought to be “choices consciously and intentionally made by individuals between alternatives”(Lukes, 1974: 21); thus they are analysed from the sources that show the sequence of those decisions. The need to represent the views of the leaders largely dictated the selection of news sources and media.

This research aims to illustrate how the distinction was carefully inculcated as a tool of mobilisation and alienation. These case studies (Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia) are selected to show patterns of alienation. Agency plays a more significant role than hitherto acknowledged in the literature (Adjara did not explode because Islam was not securitized to the same level as nationality). Contrary to many observers who prefer to focus on the standoff of great powers or adhere to the primordial arguments (Posen, 1993, Nuriyev, 2007, Rondeli, 2000), this thesis will scrutinize the role of agency which acted and spoke in the name of people. When pointing to agency, it means shifting focus to the nationalists and their supporters who vied for political influence in the post-Soviet republics. In thinking about the evidence and what needs to be observed the major task is to reveal and then conceptualise the texts, speeches and behaviour of political agents of the period under analysis. The variations in the discourse and its direction toward hostility constituted a major part of the problem with the autonomous entities within the Georgian SSR. The central issue revolved around the handling of the crisis through actions i.e. words and utterances, or to be more specific “performatives” (see

Chapter 3 Austin, 1975). One can see how a theoretical model of securitization expands the understanding by retracting significance of others (Wæver, 2011: 474).

This thesis aims to demonstrate how the discourse affected both political and social aspects of disintegration and the way in which nationalism and history became the dogmas that refashioned people's perception of one another within the region. It aims to explore how discourses exercise power in a society as they "institutionalize and regulate ways of talking, thinking and acting" (Jager and Maier, 2009: 35). The data used for this research study comprises speeches, newspaper articles, certain TV reports⁴ and official documents dating back to the years of political turmoil — late 1980s and early 1990s. The study will examine the decisions of the Communist authorities as well as nationalist leaders who sought to come to power in 1980s. It is the human dimension of the conflicts that will prompt further re-evaluation of the events. Such an approach is the ultimate way to make causal inferences that can complete our picture of unfolding violence. By reconsidering observations and variables, one can alter existing judgments that have produced negative ramifications across the region.

This thesis will borrow Juha Vuori's assertion that understanding securitization in diverse political and social orders and contexts is vital for studies of this phenomenon (2008: 94). He insists that securitization theory should be applied to the study of all types of political orders (2008: 66). At the same time, Vuori is concerned about the conceptual purity of a theory when applied to other types of political systems (2008: 66). Vuori indicates that security serves political goals in "various contexts" and that scientists should examine as many cases as possible

⁴ Many of them are available on YouTube

(2008: 68). Indeed, some cases might require a light theoretical “stretching” or extension, because of certain political or cultural peculiarities. By diversifying the theoretical scope, it will attempt to improve the degree of understanding of the hidden phenomena underlying the controversy. By offering a distinct viewpoint the project could empower and strengthen area studies on the Caucasus and inspire future projects. Doubtless, by better understanding the tenets that underline nationalism and conflict we might make the scholarly community more confident about the measures that could contain nationalism (Hechter, 2000: 18).

1.2. Research design

These three cases were selected for observation as they provide ample examples of hostile discourses that prevailed the social and political space in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia during the disintegration of the Soviet Union. They show how enmity was constructed and inculcated into communities in the late 1980s.

This research project focuses on the ‘how’ question. It will address the role of discourse and trace a correlation between spoken words and their political consequences. This study embarks on an analysis of speech and narratives that proved influential in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet political space in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The design incorporates the conceptual basis of the research (securitization), methods of data collection and analysis that will help to answer the research question. That question is: how did political discourse turn ethnic difference into an instrument of securitization in the South Caucasus during the late Soviet and the transitional period?

My hypothesis is that the securitization of ethnic differences, as well as of language about historical narratives, was a significant factor of the conflicts in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia during the period under question. Political conflicts were influenced by specific narratives, for example ethnic difference, that require thorough examination. To a greater rather than lesser extent, speeches and utterances help to measure policies of escalation; tone, inflexion, content and the meaning of words, actions, and in-actions, all paved the way to armed combat.

This thesis is a piece of qualitative research focused on narratives that assigned form and meaning to words like 'justice', 'nation' or 'state'. These are some of the key narratives identified during the research project. It will study the data and draw conclusions about the role of the discourse in escalating political conflict. It will examine the process of 'othering' through speech and public media across the region.

This thesis makes two original contributions to the field. It provides empirical evidence about the relationship between speech acts and political conflict, which supports the theoretical models proposed by John Austin, Michel Foucault and Thierry Balzacq among others. Secondly, it offers new insights into the historical evolution of the conflict in the South Caucasus. There are three geographical areas of conflict, which will be addressed in the empirical chapters – Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The research traces the impact of factors (political discourses and narratives) that had specific consequences which escalated conflicts.

Each case study features a conflict over the status between the centre and periphery of the former Soviet Republics. It addresses the narrative concerning

nationalism and history and the attitude of political actors (representatives of the intelligentsia) toward adversaries. The empirical part is mostly a retrospective analysis of the cases (Vaus, 2001: 227). These case studies represent a blueprint of how political actors and their words construct or emphasize differences between communities, and how the use of adjectives in political and societal contexts create the world anew. They illustrate how nationalist leaders leveraged the environment to create a dominant narrative about ethnic belonging and seized the space of deliberation.

By addressing these cases, this study will produce an explanatory framework that will elucidate the most extreme causes of confrontation in the context of the South Caucasus. Anti-Communist movements were important shapers of the political environment and they had a crucial role in forming the post-Soviet facets of the region. The discourse of history, nationalism and ethnic hatred will reveal how political entrepreneurs exploited emotions among the populace as they triggered violence.

Furthermore, such a methodology will assist us in altering the geopolitical and structure-based analysis of the problem. This approach will help to reconstruct the agent-structure nexus that influenced social reality in the period.

These case studies will build an analytical model of the abuse of ethnic differences. It is instrumental for this research to show the tools influencing narratives and symbols that were used to coerce the public into following the nationalist agenda. In part, the conflicts were about the dehumanisation (in Schmittian terms) of adversaries; for example, Armenians defined Azerbaijanis as

‘Turks’⁵ — i.e. it was legitimate to annihilate them. Georgian nationalists declared that Georgia must be a unitary state, and refused to acknowledge the rights of the autonomous units. The speeches and statements analysed in the coming chapters will explain how the national movements, and nationalists, acted to implement their agendas. It is an invitation to understand how organizations and political actors play with categories such as ethnicity or nationalism, and how they affect processes and relations and define consequences and institutions (Brubaker, 2002: 183).

This study is about revisiting the definitions of problems. Dora Yanow differentiates between the approach of “right answers” and an “inquiry”; in the first instance, right answers imply that the perception of the matter under consideration is accurate, whereas an inquiry deals with the investigation of the definition assigned to the problem (1996: 15). Therefore, if one distances oneself from the existing definitions and revisits the adjectives of division, then it will be possible to reassess existing views and evaluations. There is a question here about the content of the conflict: was the enmity embedded deeply within society or did politicians impose and exploit it? Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in-between. It is very difficult to believe in either-or answers, as social discontent involves many actors and factors simultaneously. Any conflict involves people, their perception and values or lands that are to be “defended”. There are always some principles or traditions that ‘need’ protection. Zygmunt Bauman argues that *“the Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture”* (in Booth, 2007: 120). In other words, the escalation of the

⁵ Referring to the 1915 Genocide

violent conflict must be seen as a problem of a society, which was unable to overcome the differences. This project intends to argue that a society has to re-think its own deeds because a social discourse imbues the ideas that produce certain consequences. Subsequently, the argument that geopolitical alignments and the collapse of the Soviet Union were the main causes of the armed confrontation can be challenged. As this research will not argue that those conflicts were totally independent from the influence from Moscow; however, it is important to elucidate on the discourses of division and how and why they resonated across the communities. This research does not aim to define a common denominator, but rather to argue that there are complexities behind the confrontation that need to be acknowledged. It is based on a pluralistic view of the region; in other words, one has to bear in mind that there were multiple paradigms that defined the territorial disputes.

This research is broken down into two main empirical chapters about the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These chapters explain the patterns of mobilisation along ethnic lines in Armenia and Azerbaijan and in Georgia. These case studies provide a roadmap to the political abuse of *ethnos* vis-a-vis *demos*. The close examination of the statements and speeches of political actors that formed a particular pro-nationalist direction of outgoing Communist authorities will add explanatory power to regional studies.

1.2.4. Reliability and validity

It will be vital to consider the validity of the findings of this research by considering them altogether. One must contemplate the nature and density of the information

at hand, and if there are plausible explanations that determine the issues (Weiss, 1994: 181). Every research project is the sum of the analytical approaches utilized for establishing causal inference, which consist of both strengths and drawbacks. Therefore, the case-focused materials enlarge the experience and help an investigator to come up with an original inference (Weiss, 1994: 182).

Robert Weiss argues that an investigator's preconceptions give shape to the initial organization of the material, but that at the same time the material modifies the way of the investigator's thinking (1994: 169) — meaning that the study is a subject of cognitive bias. Selection of speeches is “necessary” because any utterance can have several meanings, thus an investigator responds to the “obligation to choose” as he/she selects the cases (Pocock, 1972: 29). Hence, the sources of validity are qualitative methods, competence and the knowledge a researcher has (Patton, 2015: 22).

To increase the trustworthiness of results, Joseph Maxwell suggests specific strategical solutions might be useful for minimizing validity threats within the context of a particular study (2013: 124). Hence this study opts for the following strategies: credibility, generalizability, reliability and confirmability (Bryman, 2004: 273).

Confirmability: bearing in mind that it is not possible to achieve absolute objectivity in qualitative study — which is constructivist by its nature — one must decrease the personal influence and biases during the whole course of examination. I am reflexive and conscious of personal influences as well as of my own observations. Certain limits of the study are explained below. Furthermore, during the process of collecting data, sources were verified so as to safeguard credibility.

Generalizability: the current study is not intended to be generalized and extended to all territorial disputes shaped by ethnic difference, though one could expect that the results and conclusions might contribute to understandings of similar cases. It will instead make a contribution by putting securitization into the context of ethnic identity and historical narratives. One might also expect readers to judge how the findings may be applicable to the analysis of populist discourse, too.

Credibility: the data selected for this project focuses on the ideas and speeches of political leaders and members of the nationalist movement in 1980s and early 1990s (see appendix). These data encompass ideas and narratives that presided over the political conflict that later on escalated into an armed confrontation. It is essential to emphasize the importance of the print media within that timeframe, as TV stations were completely under the control of the Communist Party establishment (see Benn, 1989: 17), and members of the national movement had a very limited access to the state-controlled outlets. Yet the speeches were published in *Literaturuli Saqartvelo*, a weekly newspaper of the Writer's Union of Georgia which had a turnover of twenty-two thousand copies according to the 1981 data (Redaqcia, 1983: 259). Besides this, many writers in their own right (e.g. Guram Panjikidze, Akaki Bakradze) added their voices to the nationalistic narrative.

Due to the language barrier, the publications used here in the analysis of the Karabakh conflict are in Russian⁶ or English. However, they still exemplify the content of the narratives that dominated Armenia and Azerbaijan as they gradually went to war over the autonomous entity. This study refers to the memoirs of prominent

⁶ Actually, the confrontation between two republics was mostly held in Russian as it was the lingua franca of the USSR

Soviet politicians, including Mikhail Gorbachev, his aide Anatoly Chernayev and notable scholar and Nobel Prize winner Andrey Sakharov.

Additionally, this study examines government decrees and reports, which strengthen the reliability of my sources.

Reliability: reliability is a relative concept in qualitative research. Both the researcher and participants influence procedures and their interpretation. Besides, “the interview is a social situation and inherently involves a relationship between the interviewer and the informant” (Briggs & Mishler in Maxwell, 1992: 295). However, the sources used in the researched have been verified and I have avoided using any ambiguous information that was impossible to triangulate.

1.2.5. Selection of sources

The events addressed in this study took place in 1980s, hence the data used in the empirical sections include the newspapers, magazines and TV programmes of the time (see appendix). The thesis does not focus on particular newspapers, it looks for the thoughts and discourses of individual political actors who influenced societies at the time. The information about the politicians of the time is based on my contextual knowledge and preliminary research conducted to find their speeches or letters or other materials that include their communication and opinion, video footage for example. Due to the sensitivity of the topic in the South Caucasus, I have chosen sources according to their trustworthiness, meaning that I opted for relatively unbiased reports provided by the Western media. Despite the fact that the events took place about thirty years ago, it must be noted that any researcher faces the challenge of identifying balanced and trustworthy material (see section 1.2.7). As a

way to avoid biases I chose to read wide range of information and verify their validity. One must note that there are several websites which provide some primary data on the conflicts in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh. For reasons of assurance, triangulation is used and the material from such websites has been verified and corroborated from other articles, video footage or memoirs. For example, when writing about Khojali tragedy, I did a word search in the Nexis database to find Western media sources because the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides attempted to either cover up or misreport the tragedy. The main idea of the empirical sections is to introduce the operationalization of the historical contexts that played a major role in the escalation of conflicts. I have spoken to historians and experts in regional studies when doing the preliminary research, and followed their advice while selecting the literature used in this study. Yet one must always bear in mind the challenges faced by Soviet historians caused by censorship (see chapter 4), which affects the interpretation and role of history in the former USSR.

The source of a speech by Zviad Gamsakhurdia has been verified through the video recording of the event that is available on YouTube. YouTube is used by different publishers and stakeholders to spread the old footage and make it available for the wider audiences. This online multimedia database provides access to the Soviet era programmes that otherwise would not be freely available because they are stored in the archives of the TV channels, which need special permission to obtain the access. YouTube is a convenient source, because it allows the reader to access the material without significant restrictions or a paywall. Video recordings that are used from YouTube were uploaded by people who were formerly part of the national movement or the government of the time or are from the YouTube channels of the

broadcasting companies; additionally, the interview with Akaki Bakradze is from the YouTube account of his son⁷. I have watched many of Soviet news programmes that are also available on YouTube, which have helped me to verify the events that took place. The list of programmes includes the national news programme “Vremya” (I watched most of the programmes aired from 1988 to the mid-1990), “Vzglyad” – a Friday late-night show that was aimed to guide the Soviet citizens about benefits of Perestroika and Glasnost (see appendix), “Namedni” – a short history of the USSR produced by the prominent journalist Leonid Parfenov (see appendix). During the course of the research I read the following newspapers: “*Literaturuli Saqartvelo*”, “*Pravda*”, “*Izvestia*”, “*Bakinskii Rabochii*”, “*Edinienie*”, “*Abkhazia*”, the Soviet magazine “*Ogonek*” among others. The study contains many European and American publications including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, *The Times* and *The Newsweek*. Also, I have used the articles published in the Soviet digest of the *Voice of America*. The selection criteria were guided by following the speeches and interviews or comments of the political actors who were the main influencers of the events. In other words, the newspapers were selected because they contained an interview or a comment of a person who was actively involved in the Caucasian conflicts. I have obtained approximately ten issues of Russian-language Abkhaz newspapers from Professor George Hewitt and used them to present the Abkhaz reading of the problem in the empirical chapter featuring Georgian conflicts (see appendix). During the process of selecting key political actors, I tried to be as inclusive as possible. Yet there were only a few outspoken political

⁷ Overall, as a person who lived and remembers the events, it has been much easier to find the original material, as my general knowledge and memory allows me to identify the sources.

leaders who influenced the discursive space back in 1980s. Hence, I approached the people who were in the position of power or are scholars and experts specializing on conflicts and their consequences.

There are two collections of primary sources used in the empirical chapters. The *Karabagh File*, as it is explained later, is the publication by the Zorian Institute, which collected almost all primary materials about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (for details see appendix). Another source is the volume on regional conflicts in Georgia *Regionaluri Konpliqtebi Saqartveloshi* collected and published by the Georgian researcher Tamaz Diasamidze, who conducted the study at the Centre for Study of Regionalism in Tbilisi, Georgia (for details see appendix). These publications contain the newspaper articles, interviews and statutory acts that determined the escalation of the conflicts. Most of them are copies of the original documents or articles. Yet they express opinion of particular people, which is acknowledged in the limitations of the study. One must bear in mind that the newspapers of the time offered both news and views featuring the events. The current study emphasizes the importance of views expressed by the political actors, therefore most of the articles analysed are the opinions that shaped the reality at the time.

1.2.6. Interviews

The material used for this study include interviews with experts and politicians who participated in the events twenty-five or so years ago. It was challenging to select the participants, as many of them are no longer alive or else sometimes refuse to talk. It was impossible to obtain interviews from Azerbaijani experts, but there were a few Armenians who spoke without tape — simply sharing their opinion about the

conflict. In the case of Georgia, the selection was mainly concentrated on people who participated in the events or worked for the government in 1980-90s. The list of interviewees is provided in the appendix. They were given the consent forms, which were designed in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethics Office of the King's College, London. I clearly explained to every interviewee their rights, and the purpose of the interview.

The main question I asked was how the respondent [assuming their role in events] assesses the discourses of the time. After their answers, I adjusted the subsequent questions. I followed the use of keywords in respondents' answers, but did not intend to scrutinize every "meaning unit" (Weiss, 1994: 155); rather, I focused on trends that were linked to the categories under question and on what further questions their answers raised. During the interviews I was looking to identify key themes and words, for example, the use of the words, "erovnuli" (national), "chven"- "isini" (us-them), "Ruseti" (Russia), were noted as they indicate a particular meaning in the context of the study. It is common to blame Russia for wars and talk about Abkhaz and Ossetians as "them" (outgroup). It emerged that the idea of "nation" has a symbolic power and the interviewees used it to strengthen the argument.

When summarising the material, I chose to apply "local integration" (Weiss, 1994: 159); i.e. what most respondents say about the asked question and the overall role of narratives in the escalation of conflicts. One must take into consideration that the questions were asked after two and half decades. Some of the respondents admit the importance of political discourse, but back in 1980s and 1990s they articulated hostile narratives and incited ethnic hatred. One could extract a minitheory (Weiss, 1994: 159) from the interviews: that, after decades of

observation, the political actors have now changed their perception as they think about the legacy of the conflicts.

One must also note that interviews for this research helped to support collected data. They confirm the importance of the discourse that is evident in newspapers and speeches of the time.

1.2.7. Limitations of the study

The purpose of the thesis is to offer a distinct analysis of events — an alternative perspective that allows reassessment of the causes of the hostilities. As no man can arrive at the “complete and final truth” (Booth, 2007: 189) about any subject let alone the instigation of an armed conflict, it will exercise an approach that might depict those speech acts and decisions to be prejudices of the time. Going back to Derrida’s point, it is not about choice but links and liaisons between form and meaning.

Whilst collecting data, there were certain difficulties. During the research, I conducted ten interviews and two off the record conversations in Tbilisi and London. Yet I was unable to interview anyone from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani officials and representatives of the organizations who deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue seem to be very cautious and refuse to make any comments, let alone formal interviews. I had a chance to speak to a prominent Armenian political expert, yet our conversation was held under the Chatham House rules in London. The language barrier was another impediment, though most of the Armenian and Azerbaijani

sources are available in Russian as well. There is another restriction on empirical data regarding the pogroms in Baku. Azerbaijani sources are extremely scarce and serve as limits to understanding the picture in full. The most prominent reaction to the pogroms, which is at the same time the official Azerbaijani position about the Sumgait massacres, is a piece by late scholar Ziya Bunyadov entitled “Pochemu Sumgait” [Why Sumgait?] (Bunyadov, 2010)⁸. Bunyadov accused Armenians of staging the pogroms in order to be able to blame the Azerbaijani side.

It is surely impossible to understand fully and explain international relations and particularly the patterns of conflict and cooperation in the South Caucasus. The interpretation of understanding is another issue. That is, every individual has his/her original vision and interpretation of the story or an event. It is doubtful that the analysis and interpretation of the ideas, all the way down during the process of escalation and in the aftermath, will depict a truthful account of the events. Rather, it will be a part of the whole, of the plethora of actions or inactions, which together made the war possible and inevitable at that time. Additionally, this thesis cannot reassure the reader that the stories and versions of the events told by interviewees will all be sincere. By combining social science theories and the empirical data this thesis will try to analyse the language of controversies. It must be judged on the importance of the trajectories of divisions that it emphasizes and brings to the surface.

⁸ This article is a translated copy of the essay published in 1989 in the Newsletter of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. Series of History, Philosophy and Law, 1989. No 2, pp. 115 – 121

1.3. Structure of the thesis

The first chapter is an introduction and a research design, which presents the aim of the study and offers a short overview of the work that follows. It outlines the research questions taken up by this thesis and offers a hypothesis, and also explains why the topic was selected in the first place, and how I intend to argue my case.

The second chapter is a literature review, which will address the existing approaches to the problem. It touches upon the main writings that concern the conflicts and the region, as well as works more broadly about security and nationalism. In the third chapter the theoretical and methodological points will be outlined. The fourth chapter will add explanatory power to the methodological section, as it examines Soviet ethnonationalism and the challenges that it caused during the *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. Evaluation of these trends and policies will allow for the definition of the politics of securitization used towards the groups and the autonomous republics/oblasts. For this research, I will refer to Hidemi Suganami's arguments about history and its neglect in IR, and bring "critical reflections on the nature and functions" of historical narratives towards analysis in IR (2008: 356). In fact, all of these patterns, taken together, have created and helped us to follow the politics of securitization across societies and the region *per se*. Much of the enmity in the South Caucasus was constructed through the *us and them* dichotomy, making catastrophe an inevitability. I will explore the basis of this *othering* and the power of symbols in constructing securitization. The elites referred to symbolic power, and to a certain extent attempted to persuade the public to accept their offer based on ethnic violence. The fourth chapter therefore addresses

how history was viewed in the USSR and why the dominant narratives examined in my empirical chapters were instrumental in triggering conflicts.

The fifth and sixth chapters will address the actual analysis of conflicts, one about the Nagorno-Karabakh situation and another about South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It will include a study and analysis of governmental decrees, newspaper reports, and the political speeches of leaders as well as members of the intelligentsia — including writers, actors, film directors and others. There were many prominent Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis who regularly made nationalistic and patriotic statements, remarks and declarations. Few of them dared to contradict the mainstream views about freedom and national revival. This project will analyse archival materials, and available (unclassified) government meeting minutes, to reveal the discourse between the state officials and the remarks and statements made for the public. This will help us to disclose the actual process of securitization. And, finally, I present interviews with politicians and political entrepreneurs who were involved in the escalation.

The seventh chapter will make an overall evaluation of the issue: how the agent-constructed processes have become a hindrance for nations, their development and economic prosperity. The nationalistic prejudices and historic dogmas were mainly created through speech acts and political decisions: e.g. abolition of autonomy (in South Ossetia). The speech acts served to marginalise the masses, elaborated on historical narratives and involved rhetoric, which ultimately had harrowing results. That section will analyse language as a complex, rule-governed behaviour (Searle, 1969: 12), one that has transformed into an irrevocable tool of enmity and vengeance for the securitising of ethnic and political differences.

John Searle points out that linguistic communication is the result of a theory of language and a theory of action, where the language is very much part of a theory of action inasmuch as speaking is a “rule-governed” behaviour, constructed through units of linguistic communication — i.e., the production of a sentence under particular conditions as speech acts (1969: 16-17). Assuming that there are analytical connections between the views of speech acts, meaning implied by speakers — the meaning of a particular sentence, a speaker’s intention, the understanding of the audience and general rules that govern the linguistic elements — speech acts are powerful tools for the construction of social environments (Searle, 1969: 21).

Those three conflicts are very much the “world of our making” (Onuf, 1989), and resisting dialogue and compromise to a certain extent is a part of the gamble of ruling elites. Donald Horowitz (1985: xi) claimed that ethnicity has “fought and bled and burned its way into public and scholarly consciousness”, but whether it was the ethnicity alone, or a paradigm supported by agenda-setters to vindicate ambitions and aspirations is a partly unanswered question. The argument will rest upon the hypothesis that wars aiming to eliminate potential competitors for power and influence were not merely the results of great power or geopolitical games. This work is an attempt to emphasize the role of agency and the use and abuse of language and rhetoric in policies of war-making.

2. Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This section of the thesis will analyse the existing overviews and general evaluations of the conflicts and divisions. This section introduces literature about nationalism and identity, ethnic conflict and its political paradigms, as well as about these three cases in the South Caucasus. It offers a critique of the existing studies that search for the answers or analyse the hostilities. Which issue is the most important for Armenia, Azerbaijan or Georgia? What are the trajectories that define their vision and perception of conflict, of understanding the enmity?

As Laurence Broers argues, these three *de facto* states appeared in the literature involving historical aspects and have never been the subject of a full 360-degree enquiry (Broers, 2013: 59-64). Hence, this chapter looks for the academic thought that defines the scholarly opinion about the region and its protracted conflicts. Notably, these sections will reveal how academic scholarship tends to be split between the Soviet or post-Soviet scholarship, which mostly focuses on the ethnic or geopolitical aspects, and the Western approach that looks for

instrumentalist reasons behind the violence. One could see how the Soviet (and post-Soviet) academia tend to look for a scapegoat when addressing the trajectories of conflicts.

Bearing this in mind, this research project will elaborate on conflict and security paradigms. This section will offer a synopsis of some studies dedicated to the topic. It will be divided into three major parts. The first part will consider views about conflict and ethnicity; the next will bring in the regional dimensions; and finally, the third will offer a summary of the gaps in the scholarly literature that need addressing.

2.1. *Selecting them*

“All my life I considered myself as a Yugoslav, not a Muslim. Now I am a Muslim because that has been forced upon me” (in Nye, 2007: 158). This quote conveys a question regarding the origins and reasons of ethnic wars. There are categories and interpretations which are forced upon societies and communities by warmongering political actors. This was the case in the Balkan crisis and the scenario was similar in the South Caucasus. People were told that they were distinct from, and, in some cases, better than, their fellow neighbours.

Clashing identities and out-group hostilities were products of discourse in which “a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (Taylor in Lebow, 2008: 477). It is evident that images produced during the debates had demeaned the identity of the “other”. Yet

this thesis will question the principle that “othering” was the essential norm of post-Soviet nation-building, because, as Gordon Allport argues, “*concentric loyalties need not clash*” and devotion to a certain circle does not imply hostility to another (1979: 44). He argues that usually clashing loyalties are of identical scope, and attitudes that are partial to the in-group do not require antagonistic attitudes toward other groups; he refers to the Jewish ‘menace’ created by Hitler, which in the end was designed to cement the Nazi leadership (Allport, 1979: 41 and 46). In other words, one political group alienates a part of society while having special interests in mind.

As Henry Hale argues, ethnicity is relational and it is vital to understand why people tend to interpret events and situations with reference to ethnic divides (2008: 8). When addressing solutions, Hale argues that ethnicity should not be treated as a “motive” but instead removed to allow for and change the predisposition of analysis (Hale, 2008: 8). In revealing the context of nationalism, one should consider that discourse is about directing attention to certain aspects of a phenomena; in other words, one can amend the colour of an object by blocking its contours from view (Wittgenstein, 2009: no: 33). By simply emphasizing one trajectory of the dilemma it does not mean that the conflict has only one face. It is always a multifaceted, multidimensional enterprise, spoken and fought by a wide variety of different political actors.

Eventually, a state-sponsored nationalism is largely directed against outside groups, which in turn leaves out the smaller groups whose cultures are ignored in nationalization project (Hale, 2008: 23). This tendency of exclusiveness forces the local groups to form their ethnic consciousness against the dominant culture (Hale, 2008: 23). Presumably, this was one of the challenges of the Soviet ethno-

nationalism, as it left out too many smaller communities and undermined their identity.

For the former units of the USSR, membership in a nation was significant, as it came to appear as an indicator of a certain degree of security in turbulent times and at the same time a means of communication. As Karl Deutsch argues, membership of a nation allows people to communicate effectively and hold the nation together from “within” (in Hechter, 2000: 12). But, instead of communication, Tbilisi (for example) launched the “legal undoing” of Soviet legitimacy by revising all treaties between Georgia and the USSR after 1921, including those which regulated the status of Ossetian and Abkhaz autonomies, and thus damaging the rights of minorities (Cheterian, 2008: 174).

Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff define ethnic conflict as an undertaking where at least one party “is organised around the ethnic identity of its members” (2010: 5). They argue that it is not a dispute that is ethnic, but that its parties interpret the causes “along actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide” (2010: 5). This thesis will emphasize the significance of words that were used to construct an ethnic divide and select ‘others’ for political purposes. It has to be realised that the conflicts in Georgia and between Azerbaijan and Armenia structured along ethnic lines were neither products of ethnic hatred nor of geopolitical shifts. There were other variables and circumstances that contributed to the escalation in those years. The political actors assigned political status to ethnic differences, which helped them to gain legitimacy. In this case, ethnic identities arose from man’s “lust for power” which transformed “churches into political organizations... revolutions into dictatorships ... love for country into imperialism” (Morgenthau in Waltz, 1959: 124).

In other words, the meanings of ethnic belonging were extremely politicized and helped the political parties to change the meaning of words like 'nation' or 'justice', making them instruments of escalation of the conflicts.

The fact that different areas with diverse populations had such different fates naturally raises the question: why were these areas not affected? Why did Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh clash with Azerbaijanis, whilst Armenians in Akhalkalaki did not? Or why were Ossetians who lived in South Ossetia designated as enemies by Georgia at a time when there were fewer ethnic Ossetians there than in other parts of Georgia. Maybe because it was a *selective othering* due to the fact that the wars were mostly local, without any spill-over effect. To be more specific, Georgians and Abkhazians fought in Abkhazia, but elsewhere remained friends. Armenians and Azerbaijanis clashed over Nagorno-Karabakh, but they lived and continue to live peacefully in Georgia. Ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis are neighbours in many parts of the Georgian capital, but they never argue over ethnic or religious difference. The same people were both *us* and *them* in different circumstances and geographical locations. Accordingly, ethnicity is not a difference that is responsible for war, but rather it was a tool used to legitimise certain securitising acts of fellow politicians or political entrepreneurs. Diversity has always been the strength of these nations and deeply embedded in their cultures. Even the Communists used to boast of Georgia's care of ethnic minorities, as there were eight languages taught at schools and the media had seven-language programmes (Forsyth, 2013: 675). The roots of the problem and the present isolation do not simply lie in ethnic differences, but rather they are the products of distorted legends about diversity and multiculturalism.

Despite many theories and presumptions tested in the study and analysis of these conflicts, scholars still miss the answers to many remaining questions. Governments⁹, experts and scholars (Cornell, 2001, Nuriyev, 2007, Rondeli, 2000) set out different conspiracy theories or accuse the strategic geopolitical location of the region between the two continents and two seas, or continue to blame history by looking for ancient hatreds between groups of people (Posen, 1993). To be more specific, the local scholarship tends to prioritize the primordial explanation (e.g. Nuriyev or Bunyadov) while the Western academics address the social constructivist aspects of the issue (e.g. Suny). The strategies and approaches employed so far by researchers and scholars, as well as by politicians, underestimate the role of agency in the conflicts. They highlight individualism and structuralism but overlook the structurationist approach (Wendt, 1987: 339). In other words, studies often disregard the fact that agents and structures are “theoretically interdependent and mutually implicating entities” (Wendt, 1987: 338). These problems remain under-researched and spawn biased and subjective judgements regarding causes and consequences, because the study of structures lacks the other half of the problem under scrutiny. The world of our making is mutually constituted, or, as Alexander Wendt puts it, “mutually implicated” (1987: 338) by the interaction of structure and agency.

The main shortcoming in studies of the South Caucasus is the understatement of agency and its role in making and shaping the conflicts. It is significant to focus on this gap, particularly on the processes of securitization. The structural problems,

⁹ The National Security Concepts of all three republics consider the conflicting areas as primary threats and outline the possible methods of solutions.

including geopolitical location and great power dictum, were misused in the discourses and actions of political actors. Without addressing this gap in knowledge, the peace-making efforts and policies based on the conclusions so far achieved fail to produce tangible results. Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia complain about *territorial problems*, the *de-facto* states remain outside the space of international engagement, and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) continue to suffer. The condition of frozen peace or an enduring stalemate is a reason to elaborate on explanations other than great power games, old ethnic hatreds or a strategic location, and instead to explore the specifics of these dilemmas.

While rethinking the conflicts and their consequences, it is essential to realise that modern security could be understood as a process of securitization/insecuritization of borders, identities and of the conception of orders; thus, securitization becomes a capacity to manage (or even create) insecurity (Bigo, 2000: 173-74). Security is more a “device” or a “technique of government” (author: or perhaps inability to govern), and understanding and analysing these techniques and the individuals who use them will help to explain securitization (Bigo, 2000: 176). Re-evaluation of anatomy of the South Caucasian conflicts will broaden scholarship on the instrumentalisation of differences. Research on the practices of actions, that is, analysis of securitization/(in)securitization and the framework of the social power balance that empowers these practices, is essential (Bigo, 2000: 177). Otherwise, the scholarly community faces an inversion, that “what is done determines the doing, when in fact the opposite is true” (Bigo, 2000: 177). Because, as Paul Veyne puts it, “what is done is explained by what the doing was at any point in history. Things, objects, are simply the correlate of practices” (in Bigo, 2000: 177). This work is

concerned by the practices that constituted that 'doing', and which determined the face of security and political alignments across the South Caucasus area.

The reality built by discourses across the South Caucasus needs reconsideration. The context and meaning given to populist texts and political manifestos continue to influence policies and politics. The words and utterances, and articulations allocated to the texts and history in general, have shaped the politics of identity and nation-building. However, identity is not fixed by nature, but rather is constituted in relation to difference (Campbell, 1992: 8). This thesis is about how the 'others' were constructed and marginalised in an attempt to form an identity or to gain the power — or perhaps both. Identity can be interpreted as "a ground or basis for social or political action", a joint phenomenon denoting some degree of sameness among a group, "a core aspect of individual or collective 'selfhood'", which is a product of social or political action, or of multiple and competing discourses (Lebow, 2008: 474). Since the question is to what extent the wars over the areas under discussion had a discursive context. The hostile environment was produced by words alone, but these same words could have created windows of opportunity for settlement of disputes.

To sum up, this research will present the issues that supported the escalation of conflict and conceptualise the relationship between structure and agency, central governments and local authorities, political and national identities, construction and securitization of enemies and relations shaped along antagonism. Bearing in mind that there is no given or fixed risk or threat in the social world, danger is not an objective condition and it does not exist independently of those who might consider

it as a threat (Campbell, 1992: 1). For David Campbell, there is no risk *per se* in reality — but rather, *anything* can be transformed or analysed as a risk.

2.2. Mapping friends and threats

The South Caucasus is a patchwork of many ethnic and religious groups. Diversity and multiplicity in the region have been more a strength rather than a weakness for millennia. The many faces and facets of the region produced a rich social and cultural neighbourhood. The plurality of cultures made the region an important trade bridge between the East and the West. Buoyant commerce and the exchange of goods shaped the fabric and texture of social and political life for centuries. As Ronald Suny highlights, the region was diverse and Armenians were mostly urban and occupied economic and technical positions representing certain sub-elites in Georgia and particularly in Azerbaijan (2003: 496). There were many victories and failures, territorial claims between the principalities, and finally the Soviet ideological imprint changed the socio-political landscape of the region. The Bolshevik legacy made the process of adjustment from hierarchical order to anarchical society a painful experience.

For the purpose of the current research, 'region' is a "geographically clustered subsystem of states" that has a sufficiently distinctive internal structure and can be differentiated from a wider international system (Buzan, 2012: 22). The regional approach is a level of analysis which lies between the state and the international, and has become an important aspect of the modern international system (Buzan, 2012: 26), gradually acquiring more significance in a leaderless world. Buzan argues that regions will remain an essential factor in forming and shaping political

transformations for decades to come (Buzan, 2012: 26). The growing and enhanced role of regions in an evolving and changing international society is one of the reasons for a regional approach to the South Caucasus problem.

Despite its geographic and political proximity, the region of the South Caucasus is subject to debate. Some scholars describe it as a “negative” region; that is, a space where the region exists but lacks internal interaction (Coppetiers in German, 2012: 24). Tracy German addresses the causes, including the lack of Caucasian identity and the absence of shared affinities (2012: 17). The term ‘South Caucasus’ developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union to substitute the use, in the Tsarist period, of the name of the province Transcaucasia. Ghia Nodia assesses the change as a significant distancing from the Soviet era clichés (in German, 2012: 23). Ismailov and Papava have offered a detailed definition for the geographical area, dividing Caucasus into three sections: the Central Caucasus — Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia; the Northern Caucasus — the border regions of the Russian Federation; and the Southern Caucasus, which consists of three Central Caucasus states alongside eastern areas of Turkey and northwest Iran (German, 2012: 23). However, putting aside the broader approaches to geographical indicators, the South Caucasus in this study refers to the three states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, including their de-facto republics of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia.

Conflict is a struggle with the aim of achieving particular objectives and simultaneously to neutralise, injure or eliminate rivals (Coser in Horowitz, 2000: 95), although Donald Horowitz notes that the nature and extent of goals and methods are open to investigation (2000: 95). This has been the standard prevailing view of confrontation between individuals and/or their groups. Georg Simmel explains the

sociological aspects of a conflict and argues that it is an ordinary form of relations that sociology studies within the complexity of life (1964: 20). Simmel thinks that even the moral philosophers could not move too far away from the old Roman maxim *homo homini lupus* (Simmel et al., 1964: 28). Yet is this evaluation always true, and does it help to explain and answer all those complex puzzles that surround a political dispute?

Ethnic conflict is a relatively new notion for the international community. The problem gained increased significance after the collapse of Communism when violence erupted in Eastern Europe (Gilley, 2004: 1156). It is defined as either a political or a social conflict involving different groups, which possess a certain marker of ethnic identity (Gilley, 2004: 1155). That distinct identity could have some consequences for economic, social or political development (Gilley, 2004: 1155) is, however, open to debate — i.e., whether the possession of a different ethnicity or language makes confrontation inevitable. Are ethnic conflicts “ethnic hatreds” or a myth misleading society (Bowen, 1996: 3)? Ernest Gellner has ruled out ethnicity as a single force behind war: he calls it a tool of “political legitimacy” (2006: 1) that could be revived using values to achieve political goals.

Primordialists consider ethnicity to be a “fixed characteristic” of communities, which cannot be changed by individuals, thus tensions between the groups are “natural” and conflict is embedded in ethnicity (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 5, Levy, 2001: 16). The main criticism of primordial views is directed at the belief in “fixed” identities and a failure to address transformations “over time and place” (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 5). This notion lacks explanation for new and changed identities as well as why there are other ethnic groups who do not fight, but live in

peaceful coexistence (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 5, Levy, 2001: 16). Apart from the argument that not all different groups fight, it is also significant to bear in mind that identities that are depicted as 'fixed' are very much products of interactions and the communication of groups. Thus, identities are prone to change from time to time. Some scholars argue that ancient rivalries were suppressed in the former USSR and Yugoslavia, and that the collapse of institutions had caused conflicts among the units. But not all units fought, and the intensity of violence varied across the cases.

Clifford Geertz defines a primordial attachment as a 'given' of social existence. Givens are kinships and affiliations by blood, speech, custom, dialect or other social practices. Geertz allocates them a certain degree of power, though the empowering role of such affinities varies across societies (Geertz, 1963: 109). Meanwhile, Geertz points to pathological inclinations that might follow from allocating political supremacy to 'givens' in modern societies (1963: 110). Encouragement of primordial rather than civil political communities brings about destruction and disorder. A weak tradition of civil political development coupled with the poor structure of a welfare government transform primordial attachments into tools for the demarcation of political units (Geertz, 1963: 110). Using primordialism as a "rock solid" foundation for analysis is misguided and underpins "biased observation" regarding the threats of ethnic difference (Laitin, 2007: 26). This research is focused on the methods of transformation and tools of demarcation of ethnicities across the South Caucasus. My argument emphasizes the excess importance attached to those 'givens' by certain political actors and groups.

Meanwhile, instrumentalist scholars define ethnicity as a political tool utilised by individuals or groups to meet material or other ends (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 5,

Levy, 2001: 16, Gellner, 2006). For instrumentalists, ethnicity does not have any independent value outside the political realm. Historical myths and narratives are used to glorify one's own people and demonise others, and help to mobilise the masses and armies in the name of a particular cause (Levy, 2001: 16). Constructivists point to the social origins and nature of ethnicity that is constructed from social interactions (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 6).

To summarize, the fact that the ethnic conflict is a contemporary occurrence, one can lean toward the instrumentalist evaluation; as the primordial givens are put into context by individual actors while they communicate with wider audiences. Hence, investigation of the connection between the speech act and securitization helps to unravel the context of enmity.

2.3.Nationalism and ethnicity

For the purpose of this study, it will also be necessary to offer a working definition of the concept of nationalism. All ideological or religious "isms" have a political connotation and possess capacity to amend political agendas. Yet nationalism must rank among the most contentious principles, entailing security, language, culture and identity. Michael Hechter defines nationalism as a mix of political activities that "aim to make the boundaries of the nation coterminous with those of the state" where a nation is a culturally different collective that strives to achieve self-governance (2000: 7). Predominantly, nationalism resorts to the belief that individual members of the nation are wealthier with self-determination than without (Hechter, 2000: 30).

Nationalism is constructed from borrowed “imagery and verbiage” from the “organic option”, notes Gellner, but rests on the social reality of an atomized society (1995: 2). Nationalists like to claim that “nations constitute the building blocks of humanity” (Hurrell, 2007: 123). Andrew Hurrell argues that nationalism is purely connected to the emergence of industrial society (as Gellner) (2007: 123). He defines political nationalism as the most “persistent and pervasive” ideology of the modern state system, which has been “intimately implicated in the exercise of immense political power” (Hurrell, 2007: 122). Hurrell argues that national self-determination acquired politically and morally powerful “justification” to pursue the system of nation-states, and there is no other doctrine that might challenge the trend (2007: 122). Hence, nationalism is a political doctrine that justifies actions or inactions of political leaders. The current study considers that despite the symbolic overtones assigned to nationalism in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, it was a toolkit for mobilization of public against particular communities.

Ernest Renan famously stated that a nation is an act of solidarity, it ascertains the past, but is reiterated in the present, so that the nation’s existence is “a daily plebiscite” (1990). This was not the case in the Soviet Union, as the system was absolutist and did not involve daily participation of people. The very existence of a society (*Gesellschaft*) was rejected and as Manuel Castells explains, the enduring statism and its consequences for the space of the former USSR was predisposed by the destruction of civil society “after decades of systematic negation of its existence” (2000: 67). Therefore, communities across its units lacked the experience of “plebiscite”; instead they were ruled by economic five-year plans.

In Anthony Giddens's interpretation nationalism is a primarily psychological occurrence that implies affiliations of certain individuals to a set of symbols and beliefs that form and shape their political order; whereas a nation exists collectively within a demarcated territory (1985: 116). As Giddens argues, nationalism is a product of the eighteenth century and a nation is a "pre-eminent power container" (1985: 119-120). In other words, nations and nationalism are social constructs that make and operate a political order.

In offering his definition of a nation-state, Giddens insists that it is a set of institutional forms of governance that maintain an administrative monopoly over a territory and its rule is sanctioned by law and control of the means of both internal and external violence (1985: 121). Political leaders tend to produce social biases, when they address the targets of their political discourse: they are specifically tailoring the discourse for mass audiences. The claims about 'nation', 'people' and 'history' are very effective tools of mobilisation.

Walter Bagehot once said that the nation is a phenomenon that "we understand as long as we are not asked", but one is unable to explain it in brief and coherent terms (in Bauer, 1996: 39). Certainly, politicians struggle to interpret the meaning and subject of a nation but mostly stumble when facing the question. The central problem with nationalists is that they exuberantly investigate and invent divisions and differences between communities and then exploit them, whereas societies who know that the vehicle for advancement are their commonalities are often disenfranchised by aggression and narratives of national mobilisation. The power of words and discourses of ethnic superiority can create a moral crisis that drives communities to war and conflict. Nationalists play a game of domination

founded on myths, lies and bigotry that breaks a society and ousts certain groups from humanity. The preponderant narrative deprives many of dignity and directs them against the few. Eventually such nation-building endeavours end up in the collapse of humanism as it happened in the South Caucasus. Elaborating on the argument, one must always remember the power of dominant narrative and consequences of its abuse. Nations can be founded on myths and history, but they can also destroy communities and societies that nations are supposed to protect.

Another element of confusion about nationalism arises from its treatment of national identity as “a system of absolute values”, which transforms the relativism of “ethnic shifters” into “eternal verities” that removes the relativism from the moral terminology of identity (Herzfield, 1997: 42). An “ethnic shifter” in this context means that there is a particular focus on certain values or images (e.g. Abkhaz ethnicity) in the discourse (Galaty, 1982: 5). Its meaning mostly depends on the relationship between the social group and the essential social identity of the ‘speaker’ (or another group involved in the discourse) - the ethnic shifters apply principles of discrimination, making ‘outsiders’ look inferior (Herzfield, 1997: 83). To be more precise, adherence to “absolute values” emphasizes extremes and causes states to appear as eternal edifices. In other words, the “political morality of nationalism” attempts to transform ethnic identity into a national character or a “fixed designator”, as these form a convenient technical vocabulary of a fixed political order (Herzfield, 1997: 42-43). The meaning of ethnic identity thus became a fixed symbol of discrimination against targeted groups in the South Caucasus. Having identified the meaning of ethnic shifters and their application in the creation

of a new political morality one has to address the dilemmas originating from the interpretation of history.

Distorted and reconstructed history has always been a part of the problem, as highlighted by many scholars, as it tends to serve the purposes of nationalists. Margot Light emphasizes the fact that the Russian identity that was too closely tied to the empire. This solid link between the state and empire made it hard for Russians to digest the independence of its former colonies (Light, 1995: 40). Partially, revised history was to blame, as in the Caucasus Russia had been a symbol of opportunities and development, a beacon of advanced culture rather than an aggressor (Light, 1995: 42). Light's point is relevant, though the use or maybe abuse of historic narratives needs more attention and scrutiny. The meaning assigned to history as well as its communication will help to shed light on the issue.

In his book, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus*, Ohannes Geukjian (2012) analyses ethnic differences and territorial claims, and looks for historical causes of disputes in Soviet nationalisation policy. Following Geukjian this thesis recognises the role of Soviet indoctrination, nevertheless, it is concerned that while so many representatives of the intelligentsia and nationalist leaders acknowledged perverted stories and falsified truth, why and how did they then go on to deploy such stories and falsehoods with the aim of securitising and ultimately mobilising their populations? The arguments that are aimed to protect nationalists — as heroes who defend a native land — in fact make securitization theory more plausible in this case. Social engineering was the official policy of the Soviet government. They (nationalists) all knew this fact. If nationalists were so conscious of the needs of the 'people' then why did they go on deliberately to misinterpret and

misrepresent so many ideas and facts? The following paragraph will address the viewpoints on nationalism as a process.

Mark Beissinger (2002) examines nationalism and the ethnic diversity of the USSR: for him nationalism is a “recursive and emulative process” where the successes of prior acts (mobilisation) create an inertia, which brings more people to the streets (2002: 141). Beissinger addresses the crisis of belonging that had riven the Soviet Union from the very beginning of its existence. The question about belonging to the state had both an ambiguous and inconsistent answer (Beissinger, 2002: 50). It might be considered that this ambiguity was the cause of the internal spread of nationalism. Beissinger gives the example of how the Baltic republics shared knowledge and expertise with fellow colleagues from Moldavia, Armenia or Georgia, thus creating “transnational phenomena” of revolutions (2002: 85). Nevertheless, one could argue that not all lessons were learnt. The nationalists, as in most cases, were hardliners across the South Caucasus. At a certain point they were captivated by emotions, leaving no room for rationality. It was hard to digest so much information about the world and life outside the Iron Curtain and to accommodate them into nationalist rhetoric (in fact, they were convinced that everybody was nationalist). The discourses were so far from reality that communities were at war with own identities. Beissinger provides quantitative research about the trajectory of conflict and the process of development, finding that political liberalisation produced the greatest impact on mobilisation, because it supported the organising capacities of nationalist elites (2002: 140). Evidence is given in the form of data, showing the number of people who went to demonstrations. However, the very way in which nationalists used liberalisation and liberal values is the most pertinent factor

for the purposes of the present research rather than calculating public participation in demonstrations. In fact, the entire process was less about figures and mass participation, but more about instrumentalising liberalisation.

Beissinger identifies several tides of nationalism that escalated the situation across the former Soviet Union and he argues that repression could have limited the scale of violence (2002: 453). Yet if the authorities had arrested nationalists *en masse*, they might have risked turning them into martyrs. It was hard for a closed society to launch an open debate and find a compromise through the deliberation. The arrest of nationalists would have emphasized the meaning of identities and national pride.

As mentioned, the identities and their interpretations were part of the dilemma. Ronald Suny discards *realpolitik* approaches and examines the construction of identities (1999-2000). Suny argues that the political actors had exploited various identities that influenced their actions both domestically and internationally (1999-2000: 139-140). He stresses that primordial readings of longevity and stability of identities marginalise the conceptual possibilities of identity (1999-2000: 142). Suny's point moves identities to central stage as he posits that opinion shapers perceive and construct the world out of those identities (1999-2000: 177). Indeed, the social construction of identities does produce an impact on formation of concepts and visions of elites, but the means and methods of the communication of perceptions is another factor that shapes the policies and politics. The formation and understanding of certain paradigms is one facet of an issue; nevertheless, methods and ways of transmission can change the primary meanings and re-shape them, which brings us to the point that the arrest of nationalists could

have triggered further radicalisation among the ethno-nationally structured communities. Having said that, one has to turn now to importance of myths and their relevance to nation-building.

For this, one has to touch upon the construction of the identities which are understood within the “self-perceived” boundaries (Armstrong, 1982: 6). For this study it is relevant to introduce the concept of “*mythomoteur*” (Armstrong, 1982), which implies that myths are magnified by their fusion with other myths, thus defining identities in relation to a particular polity (9). In other words, this combination offers a constitutive myth for the construction of a nation. John Armstrong observes that ethnicity is a bundle of shifting interactions and it does not represent a nuclear component of social organization (Smith, 2015: 165). To expand, Armstrong lays down the paradigm which helps us to understand methods that construct and consequently politicize identities. As my empirical chapters will demonstrate, some stories were used to arouse intense solidarity against an “alien force” (Armstrong, 1982: 9). Mythomoteurs have religious components (283) and help the narrator to increase his awareness of a “common fate” among the audience (people) (9). By emphasizing symbols, an enunciator does not specify a time but offers a story which is floating in time. This in turn is an effective tool of mobilisation, as symbolic interactions are communications that help to define boundaries between the groups. Armstrong suggests that the mechanisms that produce the symbolic boundaries are words, as they warn a group or community where the separating barrier is located (1982: 8). It is instrumental to pay attention to the frequency of the constitutive political myth or to have a mythomoteur which is defined as a force

that “sustains a polity and enables it to create an identity beyond that which can be imposed by force or purchased by peace and prosperity” (in Smith, 2015: 167).

Indeed, the reasons and causes featured and addressed in these multiple volumes and publications reflect some part of truth, but the often-exaggerated significance granted to a particular paradigm cannot denote the depth of problems. This argument highlights the *selectivity* of utterances and historic narratives. The words that mobilised and marginalised millions of citizens are to be placed under scrutiny. The majority of authors pay less attention to the meaning attributed to *historic facts*; although Victor Shnirelman views conflict as the present lived through the lenses of the past. The extreme politicisation of ethno-political relations within the USSR served as catalyst of the conflicts (Shnirelman, 2001: 3). Nationalism became an integral part of political life at all levels boosted by distorted history promoted by the Soviet ideological machine. Soviet propaganda hailed the primordial approach to ethnicity and largely *benefited* from this evaluation (Shnirelman, 2001: 4). The country was administered through national autonomous republics or districts (oblast). Ethno-nationalism was one of the major organising principles of the Soviet system, because it helped to divide. The indisputable “historical truth” that bolstered the cleavages was the result of political manipulation of scholarship (Shnirelman, 2001: 5) that was widely practiced across the country. History was an efficient instrument for the political establishment seeking total and utter control over the hearts and minds of the people they governed. One Russian historian accurately defined social memory as “a creative process” rather than historical facts or records (Gurevich in Shnirelman, 2001: 5). Consequently, such manipulated views have influenced political behaviour in the South Caucasus. The

scholarship in the 1920s and 1930s combined with political engineering gave a violent aspect to patriotism. Historians gave credence to the struggle of “indigenous people” against “newcomers”, and it became a competition for ancient ancestors confirming rights and sovereignty over the given territories (Shnirelman, 2001: 386). The mass polarisation of mainstream thought became one of the key features of ethnic conflict. Political narratives have fostered the rise of “in-group” solidarity and “out-group” hostility making “newcomers” unwelcome guests (Shnirelman, 2001: 387). Another dichotomy concerned continuity and discontinuity of languages (Shnirelman, 2001: 387). The age and origin of the various languages was part of the divisive discourse that promoted an instrumentalist approach to the perception and interpretation of the past; scholars were exposed to massive pressure by censorship and government, incorporating school textbooks and historic maps (Shnirelman, 2001: 391-392). In the struggle for a better past, an imagined community of marginalised people was created. In other words, education policy aimed to teach loyalty through falsehood and mythmaking, at the same time creating “others” and a permanent sense of danger in those they ruled. In fact, historic narratives based on a revised history curriculum were part of the securitization and to a certain extent predisposed the process of securitization.

To sum up, nationalism was depicted as a system of absolute values and ethnic belonging helping to forge a sense of belonging to a particular in-group. Instead of its original objective of state-building, nationalism became a category that atomized the countries and widened the rifts inherited from the Soviet past.

2.4. Trajectory of delusion

The people behind the nationalistic movements in the region aimed to gain legitimacy and replace the Soviet authorities. Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as a double vacuum, which is “naturally engendered” after “Soviet Jacobinism”, during which time there were no rival ideologies and, particularly, rival institutions (Gellner, 1992: 250). Nationalism embraced several determining principles, including territory and cultural affiliations, to draw the borders (1992: 250). The lack of institutions enabled a reification of discourses. That is, the speeches and opinions of nationalist leaders were equated to sacred sermons. The words and speech acts became an invisible security threat, leaders began hunting for potential enemies, dividing people into *us* and *them*. Referring back to Gellner’s point about institutions, the thesis will demonstrate how institutional opportunities were rejected and missed. The *us* against *them* dichotomy increased this apathy, exacerbating the sense of ‘tragic delusion’ instead of supporting transition from a community to a society.

The empty spaces left by the vacuum of authority paved the way for political entrepreneurs and warlords in a search for power. Ethnic differences were highlighted by security discourse at a time when the public felt insecure after the sudden collapse of the country. The Soviet version of Marxism was “a rigid doctrine of economic determinism” and was endorsed as “objective science” (Rupert, 2010: 166). However, the regime provided some basic services, including education, healthcare and *perceived* security (it was not security but fear of state power). Therefore, the sudden meltdown caused a degree of insecurity, which became a lucrative opportunity for certain groups poised to seize the power from the Communist Party.

Nationalism was an incentive to consolidate around an objective "them" to divert the wave of expectations. Vicken Cheterian partially shares this viewpoint. He argues that it is a widely accepted view among politicians, the media and academia that the conflicts in the Caucasus were determined by nationalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union lacked deeper analysis. He concludes that the cleavages were more the "exception" rather than "normality" (2008: 2); thus, he rejects traditional narratives including the "Russian factor" and insists on a "reconstructed" perspective of the clashes. Simply putting aside the nationalistic paradigm, he considers the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a possible cause of conflicts (2008: 5). However, Cheterian does not accept "uncertainties" like the collapse of the USSR to be a cause of war, as such an approach will limit the scope of scholarship (2008: 5). Thus, his position further strengthens the debate about constructivist approaches to the South Caucasian conflicts.

Moreover, whilst attempting to explain the conflicts, Cheterian devotes attention to the distorted interpretation of history and the lack of marketplace for exchange of ideas and discourse during the Soviet times (2008: 41-42). Indeed, differences in the evaluation of the past had a role in all three conflicts; additionally, the nationalistic approach to federal structure and military preferences for certain ethnicities have their own stake in the conflict (2008: 43-46). Cheterian insists that the wars were the outcome of a dichotomy — the collapse of the state and state building (2008: 7). While addressing nationalism, Cheterian believes that nobody thought about the empty spaces left after the collapse of the Soviet Union; the breakup was just labelled as a "*primary*" (author's emphasis) cause (2008: 21). He notes that, overall, both Western and Soviet scholars lacked the tools and expertise

to deal with the complex patterns and consequences of the dissolution of the empire (2008: 22). This was a case where nationalism had passed the phase of state making and become a state-breaker (Cobban, 1969: 17). Cheterian argues that wars and violence were primarily caused by the “shrinking of the state” and the rise of private actors; whereas, the growing nationalistic mobilisation was addressed in best Soviet traditions with military force (2008: 26 and 32). Therefore, it must be noted, that political leaders highlighted only differences and empty spaces were filled in with hostile narratives, laying down the foundations of a new Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Consequently, the emerging new states were locked up into a narrative, which was mostly the continuation of the Soviet ethno-nationalism (see ch. 4). A vacant social space was infused with a sense of exhilaration, one which emboldened the nationalists. At the same time contemporary scholarship was not ready to face the complexities of conflicts.

The new elites applied the old rules, thus proving their lack of innovation and political insolvency. Indeed, in the late 1980s the state was diminishing daily, failing to provide any services, but the way the private actors chose to substitute the state became a problem. The aforementioned, rigid outlook and fixed ideas [of the actors] had a part to play. Here we need to scrutinise the actions and discourse of the private actors and their audience — how fear was mutually constituted between them.

Rogers Brubaker considers nationalism to be a category of practice, and in order to understand the patterns of nationalism, he argues, we have to explore “the practical uses” of this very category and the means by which it can organise political discourses and action (2003: 7). The question is not ‘what is a nation?’ but rather, is ‘how is nationhood institutionalised as a cultural and political nexus?’ How does the

nation perform as a practical enterprise, or “classificatory scheme or cognitive frame”? Why are the “nation-evoking” and “nation-invoking” undertakings of politicians relatively successful (Brubaker, 2003: 16)? Brubaker also argues that it is not quite appropriate to consider ethnic groups as protagonists of struggles; rather, “vernacular categories” have more an explanatory power (2002: 166). He suggests that “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” largely reify the ethnic groups as they crystallise group feelings (Brubaker, 2002: 167). Nationalism is an instrument with dual effect — Cheterian (2008: 26 and 32) rightly notes the dichotomy involved in the conflicts. Therefore, it is vital to question the content attributed to nationalism and its interpretation across the elites. How was it explained and communicated, and at the same time accepted, by the communities? Borrowing Brubaker’s classification will help us to identify how nationalism was used for *selective othering*.

2.5. Perils of the Soviet legacy

It became a “conventional wisdom” that the Soviet Union served as a policeman of multiple ethnic groups and nations, and the collapse of the authoritarian regime lifted the “lid” on the old rivalries and “long-suppressed” resentments (Brown, 1993: 6). However, this viewpoint fails to explain why certain republics have avoided conflict and others have not. For Michael Brown, there are three main levels of possible escalation. The systemic explanation reckons with security concerns of certain ethnic groups. The empire that served as a *guarantor* of security has disappeared and thus the groups have to defend themselves. The Realist view whereby offensive operations have an advantage over defensive actions inclines groups towards the first choice. Another important factor is ethnic geography, when

the ethnic “island” is relatively small, offensive operations could be beneficial for certain actors (Brown, 1993: 7). The next level responsible for triggering the rift is domestic: i.e. if the state fails or is inefficient in addressing the problems of its own constituents or there is a nationalistic agenda in the relations between groups, or finally it could be attributed to democratisation (Brown, 1993: 8). Yet the level and quality of democracy could make the difference, as Nina Caspersen argues, if competition between the elites is centred around the conflict (2012). Moreover, Barry Posen argues that the post-Soviet conflicts were mostly determined by the “security dilemma” (1993: 103). In Posen’s view, the people who found themselves responsible for security are inclined to act in the “absence of a sovereign”. In other words, the state i.e. the Soviet Union, was unable to provide basic services and as a result, actors who rendered themselves responsible occupied the vacated positions (across the republics) of the sovereign. Additionally, Posen explains that in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union sovereigns had disappeared from the stage (1993: 104). According to Posen, the security dilemma affects ethnic groups in the same way as it works in international politics (1993: 105). He refers to the lack of truth in “historical scholarship” that helps to develop the oral history of every group, which has not been subject to critical review. Storytelling then becomes a persuasive argument in political speeches and political mobilisation (1993: 107). The central authority that suppresses the truth breaks down, and distorted records boost the political assets of new power-hunters. However, in this case it is misleading to identify this as main source because particular agents boosted that sense of insecurity; that is, fear was not a given factor. Posen insists that fear prevailed, but in this thesis the point is that fear was constructed. Here, it is useful to use Didier Bigo’s point that fears need to be understood, their social construction

deconstructed (2000: 174). It is important to analyse the redefinition of security by the agencies who participate in a "*field of security*" (Bigo, 2000: 174). Bigo emphasizes the factor of structural evaluation and the emergence of a transformed idea of security, which includes collective behaviour and cultural norms that shape the security framework of a given society. He also notes the significance of producers of the social construction of threats and their connection with securitization (2000: 174). These threats need an independent analysis as "social constructs", but at the same time we need to acknowledge the interdependence of agencies that proclaim their legitimacy (Bigo, 2000: 174).

David Lake and Donald Rothchild provide a useful assessment of the existing explanations for ethnic conflict, defining them as simply "incomplete" or "wrong" (1996: 41). Violence is neither an "ancient hatred" nor an anxiety caused by modernity; rather, conflict is viewed as an interconnection of several variables and particularly as "collective fears for future" (Lake and Rothchild, 1996: 41). The weakness of the state authority serves as one explanation for the violent clashes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The authors argue that the lack of force might be less apparent, however, governments rely mostly upon "coercion" rather than legitimacy. The suppressed and threatened groups take action, which gradually ignites ethnic violence. In the "emerging anarchy", conflict precipitates from the "strategic interactions" between and within actors. There are three key dilemmas predisposing violence amongst the groups: failure in information, credibility problems and the stimulus to use pre-emptive force or a security dilemma (Lake and Rothchild, 1996: 44). Having said that, one must still investigate the causes of fears and the scale of state weakness. Fears are considered to be the most "corrosive"

forces of politics that could endanger societies (Shklar in Wæver, 2011: 472). While focusing on fears, politics are mostly concentrated on avoiding the largest negatives rather than adhering to positive values (Wæver, 2011: 472). Governments tend to balance legitimacy with coercion, while misinformation and credibility problems result from poor communication and fall into the structurationist category. In other words, violence is not a product of an ancient hatred, but the weakness of governments is often caused by inability and the incapacity to adjust to the anarchical order and to find the most “stable” point comprising, an “optimum mix of legitimacy and advantage” (Watson in Suganami, 2005: 32). The degree of the acuteness exercised by leaders to defend and promote such ethnic approaches is truly fascinating. Clifford Geertz offers an example from the speech of the Indian statesman Ambedkar, who reiterates that “fellow feelings” are the foundation of a stable state, thus emphasising primordial sentiments (Geertz, 1963: 110-11). Ostensibly, groups that are formed along such lines could not be considered “as self-standing” units or contenders for nationhood; contrarily, the exclusiveness and absence of alternative definitions undermine not only governments but nations as well. The heads not only of leaders but of nations fall as the victims of primordial discontent (Geertz, 1963: 111). The South Caucasian turmoil demonstrates perfectly how the nations fell as victims of *constructed discontents*.

Lake and Rothchild emphasize the friction inside the group, when moderate actors are upstaged by “ethnic activists” who successfully exploit emotions, myths and historical memories and create a vicious circle that triggers violence in multi-ethnic communities (1996: 44). By analysing the methods and the grammar (the

structure of practices) of policies practiced by ethnic activists in the South Caucasus one might reveal the contribution of agency to the case.

Fear of extinction, and myths justifying ethnic violence along with mobilisation opportunities, are seen as preconditions of war by Stuart Kaufman (2001: 212). Kaufman emphasizes the power of symbols in the clashes between Azeri and Armenians as well as Georgians and Abkhazians. Kaufman offers a set of essays about former Soviet and Yugoslav conflicts where he rejects the primordial or security dilemma approaches (Kaplan and Posen accordingly) to the problem. In his reading of Posen's argument that the ethnic wars (in Yugoslavia) were attempts of self-defence in the times of 'anarchy', Kaufman argues that this anarchy was caused by the federal government's loss of control over republics and was a result of war preparation (2001: 9-10). Kaufman emphasises the "politics of ethnic symbolism" going to extremes and provoking hostility, which then leads to a security dilemma, making a war "a mutually reinforced process" escalated by extremist politics and insecurity (2001: 12). A problem with Kaufman's claim is that symbols have been re-branded: ethnic symbolism was securitised at the same time, boosting the sense of insecurity among the public. However, it was not symbolism *per se*, but rather the very way it was interpreted, together with the resulting fears of the target audience, which came together and thus made a case for conflict.

Jack Snyder renounces the unchangeable paradigm of conflicts including nationalism and ethnicity (Snyder, 1993: 80). He cites the study conducted by Human Rights Watch stipulating that "deliberate government policies" are causations of contemporary ethnic violence (Snyder, 1993: 80). Snyder suggests that the crisis between Armenia and Azerbaijan was a result of economic change and revolution

(1993: 80). He notes that the promotion of the economic shock therapy laid the groundwork for a nationalist reaction (Snyder, 1993: 80). Thus, the nationalist stance enabled the key actors to ignore the economic factors that were decisive for a smooth transition from the hierarchy to anarchy.

As Snyder notes, aggressive nationalism emerges in areas where states fail to carry out their tasks (1993: 81). Failing or non-existent institutions are unable to meet public demands and people strive to create more effective states (Snyder, 1993: 81). Nationalism then comes to the point when borders and sovereignty are in doubt, armies are in disarray and economies are out of control (1993: 81). Snyder argues that improving the effectiveness of post-Soviet states is the best way of managing prevailing nationalist sentiments (1993: 81). But, when the improvements are delayed, ethnic nationalism thrives in places where failing institutions cause a vacuum (Snyder, 1993: 86). As he refers to Karl Polanyi, hyper-nationalism and fascism are products of incompatibility of mass-suffrage in democracy with the adjustment shocks of laissez-faire economics (in Snyder, 1993: 88). In the Soviet Union, it was a failure of institutional adjustment that created the vacuum; in other words, the transition process was disorganized, and Gorbachev was unable to assure smooth change of the system. In the meantime, the nationalists did not seize the moment and acted to acquire power. They worked toward legitimizing a new order and eroded the “peripheral nations” by hailing homogeneity (Hechter, 2000: 28).

Politics in the post-Soviet states encompassed sporadic voting and appeals for popular support, but such democratic activities were conducted by weak political parties under unstable constitutional rules (Snyder, 1993: 91). Yet it is notable that

those political actors created the rules and instability was part of the plan to retain power.

It is worth saying a few words about the Yugoslavian case, as there are some similarities as well as differences. Susan Woodward attaches significance to the sense of community, though argues that historical persistence and ethnic identities cannot be essential, as the ethnic conflict school argues, but rather that the inability of a government to deliver its functions shakes the foundations of communities (1995: 17). In other words, communities and links between people do not collapse because of their ethnic affiliation or legends, but there are actual reasons and actors that direct social behaviour.

As Woodward rightly notes, certain conditions were necessary to transform ethnic differences into ethnic conflict, and conflict into war over territory and status (Woodward, 1995: 349). Before we mention the very instrumentalist approach to ethnicity, we should note that the differences do not imply conflict, let alone war. The stories across the Balkans and the South Caucasus were similar: the events involved extremely powerful nationalistic mobilisation and political entrepreneurs with ambitions to gain/retain power.

Woodward rightly states that the wars of Yugoslavia were the part of a process that had commenced with economic reforms and constitutional conflict, where nationalism and territorial claims heavily relied on other factors (1995: 335). These factors and conditions are very important in mapping down the South Caucasian cases. This research project aims to emphasize the structure and sequence of those conditions. In fact, studies of the region will acquire more scientific tools if the instrumentalisation of nationalism and politics is investigated

and better explained. As it was in Yugoslavia, the culture of collective security was largely defined by instigating violence against the *other*, who was typically a neighbour or a friend (Woodward, 1995: 337).

Nagorno-Karabakh was incorporated into the 'new wars' concept by Mary Kaldor (2012). Kaldor defines new wars as complex emergencies that are local, but at the same time "involve a myriad of transnational connections" (2012: 2). These types of wars have a political goal based on traditional identities, including nation, tribe and religion (Kaldor, 2012: 71). Kaldor's case study focuses on the demise of Yugoslavia, and she argues that globalisation has caused the emergence of new wars. However, despite Kaldor's examples, it is not very clear whether they are really new or have been simply rebranded for political purposes. Additionally, the analysis of a complex emergency should include the examination of methods and strategies practiced in a particular country. Herfried Münkler does not find anything special in new types of warfare; on the contrary, he argues that things remain mostly the same (2005: 22). Edward Newman disagrees with the label 'new', and argues that, despite the growing relationship between security and development and the economic factors involved that might explain modern wars, they do not differ significantly from similar conflicts hundred years ago (2004: 179). His argument defines the change as a more natural occurrence rather than something altogether 'new' (2004: 185). I would argue that these wars *were* new for the population of the South Caucasus republics, because their awareness about intra-state conflicts was limited at that time. However, the methods and slogans used were old, and general mobilisation was conducted along the lines of *us* versus *them* lines.

Having identified the issues linked to the Soviet legacy, one must consider that despite the totalitarian imprint, the political actors exploited fellow feelings and constructed discontents that escalated into armed conflicts. The next section will review the writings that examine the importance of geopolitical paradigms in the South Caucasus.

2.6. Geopolitical Paradigms

The overwhelming majority of the books and essays mostly written by local authors on this subject choose empowering nouns and adjectives such as: crossroads, strategic geopolitical location, borderland, and many other striking word collocations (Bertsch, 2000, Cornell, 2001, Nuriyev, 2007, Masih and Krikorian, 1999). A variety of geometric triangles, quadrangles and circles are used to map the region and the interactions of its units. Many experts and scholars work to find the right ladder of abstraction and produce an exclusive answer to all questions raised by the developments of last twenty-five years or so. The literature resembles a contest for the best apocalyptic scenario. Different authors develop their perspectives of events, elaborating on possible arrangements in the near future. They advocate diverse strategies and include almost every local, regional and global actor in *potential future wars*, setting out possible regional arrangements for the near future — Svante Cornell, for example (2001: 139). Ronald Suny rightly emphasizes that ignoring factors such as political discourse and cultural norms simplifies the neorealist analysis of conflicts; but the change in the balance of power does affect interests (1999-2000: 142). Caroline Cox and John Eibner define the Karabakh conflict as “an epic struggle between the traditions and institutions of the Turkic and

Armenian nations” and see it as a “fundamental conflict of civilizations” (1993: 6-14). Yet one should be critical of such an all-encompassing perspective, as my empirical chapter demonstrates that “traditions” in an atheist state (i.e., the USSR) could have a more equivocal meaning.

Svante Cornell defines the Caucasus as a “museum of peoples” (2001: 20),¹⁰ and points to religious and geopolitical conditions as sources of rivalries, adding that territorial control is a significant criterion in the argument between the clashing parties. However, Cornell also includes nationalism, national interests, politicisation of ethnic differences and the Soviet legacy as defining factors (2001: 54-60). The South Caucasus is described as a ‘game’ encompassing national interests and security of all actors/units. The geometrical map of political conditions and alignments, the inner and outer triangles and quadrangles, sheds light on the actual situation and balance of interests but says less about the context and implicit paradigms of tensions. Armenia perceives Turkey and Azerbaijan as a threat to its own survival and existence (Cornell, 2001: 396), and this study seeks to unpack the very ideas and content of such a perception during the years of turmoil. At the same time, Azerbaijan saw both Russia and Iran as threats and aligned with Turkey instead (Cornell, 2001: 396). Georgia depicted Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s demands in the 1980s as a threat to its existence, and territorial integrity with Russia as being the main conspirator against Georgia’s sovereignty. The Russian “hidden hand” is singled out and blamed in pieces by Thomas Goltz (1993) and Svetlana Chervonnaya (1994). Both authors describe and emphasize the role of the Russian government and military leadership in the South Caucasian conflicts.

¹⁰ He emphasizes the ethnic diversity of the area.

Another geopolitical paradigm is offered by Alexander Rondeli, who foregrounds geopolitics and unpleasant neighbours and alliances (Rondeli, 2000: 50-51). Rondeli defines the Caucasus as a “regional security complex in formation” where a “security dilemma”, the “great game”, the ethnic tensions and self-determination claims are intertwined (2000: 52). Moreover, he suggests the creation of a “buffer zone” between great powers under their “responsible supervision” seems as the best possible outcome and prospect for the region. Interestingly, Rondeli does not clarify the meaning he allocates to the notion of “responsible supervision”. Nor does he indicate the meaning and interpretation of the word “responsible” or suggest any tools to measure the degree of responsibility.

The scholar and former journalist Thomas De Waal refers to a brief conversation between President Heidar Aliev and the American envoy Carey Cavanaugh during the peace talks in Florida, USA, in 2001 (2003: 253). Their dialogue is a prime example of interpretation problems between the peace-brokers and peace-dealers and mediators. Aliev and Kocharian, who came close to signing a peace treaty, were participating in the five-day Key West meeting. Ambassador Cavanaugh hailed Aliev’s courage and emphasized that foreign friends can only provide “political, financial and logistical support for a deal”, but that the peace deal was solely the business of the two presidents: Heidar Aliev and Robert Kocharian (De Waal, 2003: 5). Despite being very close to an agreement, President Kocharian rejected a compromise and the negotiation froze. De Waal provides an in-depth story of the divisions and conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He offers a profound and detailed analysis of the events and their outcomes, covering the outbreak of war and peace negotiations. De Waal describes

the power-games in Baku and Yerevan, as well as the realpolitik vision of the conflict dominating the political elites (De Waal, 2003: 253-261). It is apparent that the parties expected assistance from elsewhere, while in fact the mediating states (US, Russia and EU) miscommunicated with each other (De Waal, 2003: 254). The chronological record of events described by de Waal leaves the reader under impression that the war and its outcomes were a lucrative political commodity for politicians. The post-Soviet states had multiple problems and conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh served as trade-offs. De Waal points to the differences between Heidar Aliev's public and private statements (2003: 268), which proves the importance of language and the content of speeches.

De Waal identifies three broad reasons for the escalation of conflict in the late 1980s: (a) Karabakhi Armenians succeeded in mobilisation using "their dusty autonomous institutions"; (b) the speed at which the hatred of others spread;¹¹ (c) the USSR Politburo's failure to exercise control over crisis situation (2003: 142-144). Moreover, "decorative nationalism" became a destructive power, smashing the nationalists on its way and causing a mixed response from the target audiences (De Waal, 2003: 144). Elaborating further, De Waal notes that the Soviet authorities, apart from "doing nothing", handed over weaponry to both sides (2003: 144). These three broad reasons were instrumental factors that were generated and implemented by particular people looking for various ends. The ideas of those agents who constructed the hostility and hatred were ultimately more significant than the Politburo's failures.

¹¹ Two famous nationalistic intellectuals, Zori Balayan and Ziya Buniatov, publicised copies of Vasil Velichko's racist report about Armenians in 1904.

Moreover, Laurence Broers suggests that focusing on the militarization of these societies stunted their economic development and political cultures helped the elites to construct even more radically exclusive identities than had existed before the armed conflict (2005: 9-11). Interestingly, the parties to the conflict tend to highlight the most extreme examples of violence (Khojaly or Sumgait), which Broers argues are not “representative” but become deeply embedded in the public memory as being the most significant (2005: 11). It may be that such trends are the consequences of the hostile discourse that helped to trigger the conflict in the first place.

To conclude, this idea of allies balancing against threats has led to the formation of a Caucasus Security Complex (Cornell, 2001: 392), where the conflicts became a centre of the region and caused the “interrelationships” (Cornell, 2001: 392) — i.e., interrelationships in the region are defined by the centrality of conflicts. The national security strategies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia depict these de-facto states as primary threats to their own security and survival. The territorial claims dominate the agenda of official meetings, thus upstaging other contemporary challenges.

The next section will address the literature that deals with causes of the conflicts in the region and possible solutions.

2.7. Territory, history and solutions

One work that examines the density of Caucasian boundaries disputes, the out-dated “territorial framework” of the Stalin era, and calls for the establishment of new,

mutually acceptable borders for all nations — including both large and small, nation-states and sub-states (Wright et al., 1995: 11). Here the weakness of the governments of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the consequent failure to fill the vacuum after the demise of the Soviet Union is highlighted (1995: 140). Edward Ozhiganov remarks that a close analysis of Georgia's two conflicts demonstrates that concepts of "historic enmity" or "communist restoration" are inadequate (Ozhiganov, 1997: 342). Christopher J. Walker offers a brief history of the tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh, and describes the situation just before and during the emergency (Wright et al., 1995: 89-115). Julian Birch and George Hewitt (in Wright et al., 1995) write about the South Ossetian and Abkhazian wars respectively. Both contributions focus extensively on ethnic differences and outline the decisions of politicians shortly before the conflicts. They argue that ethnic differences were the major causes of the conflicts. Yet, as noted earlier in this section, ethnicity was not a decisive factor. People in other parts of the country continued to live peacefully. As a result, such an evaluation is quite narrow, with weak explanatory power.

"Gha-ra-bagh!" is Mark Malkasian's (1996) monograph about the emergence of the national democratic movements in Armenia. It is a work that attempts to analyse the events in 1988 and place them into a historical and political context. Malkasian talks of the "aspirations, ideals, and frustrations" of the Karabakh Movement and discusses the legacy of the initiative (1996: 2). The book describes the events of 1988 and the role of the movement in the political reality of Armenia. The author is an eyewitness of the occurrence and delves into historic details, wanting to explain the issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh dilemma. Addressing struggles and fights, the work wishes to drop the argument that the Karabakh

movement was “a vehicle to gain power” (Malkasian, 1996: 3). It is an important work about the emergence of the crisis, yet it mostly focuses on the role of the national movement in the political life of Armenia.

Elkhan Nuriyev highlights the geographical location and Russia’s influence (2007). Nuriyev looks for a solution between the powers and their interests. He views the challenges facing the oil and conflict-rich region as a result of political turmoil between great powers. He argues that the criminals of the ungoverned territories (de-facto states) are connected to colleagues in the North Caucasus, Central Asia and Middle East (2007: 337). According to Nuriyev, Russia-US relations have a significant imprint on the situation in the region, respectively hindering the establishment of “common security system” and integration (2007: 340). Nuriyev emphasizes a “just” settlement of the disputes among the parties (2007: 5). The problem of this perception lies in an overemphasis on the outside actors. None of the powers mentioned by the author, including the United States, Russia or the European Union, have capacities to deal with internal dilemmas of sovereign states. Nuriyev himself points to the significance of sovereign rights and democracy in terms of a solution throughout the book. Yet one must bear in mind, that a solution implies a particular goal achieved, such as partition, unification or recognition or another mutually acceptable framework. But before that target is reached (or is not), there is a constant process of interactions that can amend the perception of any future model.

Therefore, a one-dimensional outlook restricts other opportunities, and the parties face stalemate partially for this reason. High hopes and expectations about a solution that will be just and embraced by all parties are an illusion with a faith that

it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This research project is concerned with the lack of multi-dimensional and diverse appraisal of mistakes and setbacks that caused the stalemate in the first place. On this point, one must adhere to the argument mapped out by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001: xvii-xviii) that conflicts and divisions cannot be eliminated as they are neither simply disturbances nor empirical impediments, and a belief that a “final resolution” is possible is a risky enterprise. Perhaps the idea of a solution remains at the level of speculation and boosts the bargaining possibilities for political elites.

To sum up this section, the authors attempt to address the reasons and emphasize the significance of territory, history and the Soviet order as well as offer suggestions about possible solution.

2.8. Political measures of security

Menon et al.'s work, *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia* (Menon et al., 1999), provides a short review of security challenges and implications in the Southern Tier of the former USSR. The authors emphasize several decisive criteria, where the balance of power takes primary position, focusing on political and economic as well as nationalism and external leverages (Menon, 1999: 22). The concept of security in the volume is defined as an issue increasing the “likelihood of conflict” and instability while boosting the risk of external involvement (Menon, 1999: 5). The contributing authors are concerned with Russia's unsettled strategies towards the Southern Tier and zero-sum outcome of the game (Fedorov and Nodia, 1999). However, the strategies of the Southern Tier countries are ignored, and the authors continue to

insist on the prevalence of realpolitik approaches (Fedorov and Nodia, 1999). Yet, such prioritising of the 'balance of power' approach precisely eradicates the possibility of a different assessment and shall be abandoned [in this thesis] as a primary method whilst operationalizing the South Caucasus problems. The articulatory power of such a notion serves as a stricture for further extension of the problem. In the end, alliances and treaties are agreed through discourses and negotiations, thus before assessing them it is worth exploring the grammar of language accelerating the events. Lubin addresses the new threats for national security: corruption and crime (1999: 206-208). Yet this thesis is about the understanding and the meaning of national security in the region, among the elites in particular. They, the elites, are mediums that communicate political terms to public and generally use or even abuse 'national security' for different reasons. According to David Campbell security is the foremost "performative discourse" that constitutes a political order, where "securing" demands "differentiation, classification and definition" because this is the way of identification (1992: 253). The Caucasian discourse of identification and definition was a failure of the elites who planned and implemented the project. It did classify and define, but the lines of differences obviously were not acceptable. The newly emerged political actors had varying interests and that was the major and decisive difference that triggered the wars.

Graham Smith et al. (1998) consider links between national identities and nation-building activities. By underlining myths, histories and cultural belonging the work is a good analysis of practices of essentialism, historicising and totalising. The nationalist policies were an attempt at de-sovietisation as well as a search for the

other (i.e. enemies) among national minorities (Smith et al., 1998: 13-18), which had various degrees of approval across the former Soviet Union. The book sketches out the application of myths and history in the development of conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and shows how arguments were built upon historical controversies dating back two millennia (Smith et al., 1998: 50-54). History was a factor for mobilisation, but the facts were put into a *favourable*¹² context, as Victor Shnirelman's work about the past of the South Caucasus demonstrates. History had a privileged meaning and status in Soviet scholarship, and propaganda employed it as a way of imposing and reinforcing statism across up to one-sixth of the world.

In the chosen reading of the situation, hostile discourses and nationalistic sentiments have securitised territorial claims and escalated the conflict. Other variables including the involvement of foreign powers and geopolitical interests had a lesser contribution to the conflict; they were convenient slogans for a rally around the flag. Where there was no violent conflict, great powers had to work out a different strategy of action. But the local leaders mobilised communities to fight the *other*, to fight *them* — the *other* which only the day before had been *us*.

2.9. Summary

As already suggested this project takes a structurationist approach. The literature demonstrates the gap that exists in studies of the region. The main emphasis across the local scholarship is placed on ancient hatreds or geopolitical as well as great

¹² Selected on the bases of political appropriation

power interests. The authors reviewed here attempt to convince the reader that structures are given categories that are almost unchangeable (Posen, 1993, Rondeli, 2000, Nuriyev, 2007). Few scholars take into account the importance of the role of agency in making and shaping the divisions (Suny, 1999-2000, Cheterian, 2008). One must note that the attitude of scholarship is divided between the local or Soviet views and the Western evaluations. The Soviet or post-Soviet scientists tend to address geopolitics and ethnic differences whereas the Western academics acknowledge the social constructivist features of the clashes. Victor Shnirelman does emphasize this fact which is mentioned above. It is true that sovereigns disappeared and the 'lid' was taken off the communities, but we need to examine and understand the methods and choices that filled and permeated the vacated space. This project will use securitization as a fact-finding concept. By re-engaging with the events under investigation, that is, the discourses and narratives, the research will focus on the context of violence, rather than "givens" (Wilkinson, 2011: 98). The research will study the securitization of nationalism and ethnic differences, speeches, historic narratives and other tools used by the elites.

Indeed, nationalism, historical narratives and insecurity had a share in post-Soviet turmoil, but it is essential to understand and explain how these assumptions were used and classified by particular actors — politicians and political entrepreneurs. Individual actors and decision-makers pushed nationalism, symbols and revised history to extremes and it would be inaccurate to think that the very existence of such symbols was a driving force behind the conflicts. Here Brubaker's argument that the ways in which nationhood has been institutionalised and

instrumentalized as cultural and political idea needs to be scrutinised is most pertinent (Brubaker, 2003).

The discourse about geopolitical location and engagement of great powers — Russia and the United States in particular — does not possess much explanatory power. International relations are the sum of the interaction of its units, and analysing only one side of such interactions would be erroneous. The example offered from De Waal's work, about the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, demonstrates the power and influence that the political actors have over definition of situations as well as their outcomes.

Russia is an important factor and actor in the South Caucasus. It was and remains a former empire whose identity is closely linked to that status. But this does not mean that the policies pursued from the North (Russia is the North for the South Caucasus) were unilateral. The parties in the South Caucasus have accepted the norms and rules offered to them. Suffice to say that defining some constructed categories as fixed and given created a problem for understanding the conflicts. This thesis will deconstruct the events and avoid fixed presumptions about the origins of wars. The work will focus on how and why governments and states/communities securitized and *othered* certain groups within themselves.

The research project will argue that despite geopolitical dilemmas and Russia-dominated political alignments, the conflicts were more of a domestic construction. Bearing in mind the role that hardliner patriots and their followers played in the build-up of hostilities. Securitization of discourses, symbols and ethnic differences changed the context of security in the region. While taking into consideration the diversity of evaluations, it will put agents and the instruments they

used to form and shape the conflicts at the centre of the analysis. The excessive focus on a solution overshadowed the need for study of other factors and variables and thus altered the path of both explanation and understanding of patterns of enmity in the late 1980s and early 1990s across the South Caucasus.

3. Chapter Three

Theory and Method

Introduction

This chapter outlines the concepts and methodology used in the study. Every crisis has to be analysed through a set of different angles that will allow revealing complex perplexities that constitute a case and thus explain and apprehend the context. In other words, a crisis is an intrinsic part of social life and its assessment must serve as a rationalizer that has a capacity to restore rationality (Fairclough and Fairclough,

2012: 3). By elaborating on that theoretical framework, this chapter aids the reader in navigating the concepts and definitions that explain the events. Drawing on Balzacq this study uses the following approach to identify the link between discourse and political conflict;

- Referent objects — issues that were seen to be threatened (e.g. nation, identity);
- Securitizing actors — political actors (or members of the intelligentsia) who considered the referent objects to be under threat;
- Context — as discourse does not emerge out of vacuum the study explains the specific context that helped the process of securitization (Balzacq, 2011a: 35-36).

These referent objects were imbued with certain meaning by political actors, and had the effect of securitizing public discourse. The conceptual framework of securitization is explained in section 3.1., which outlines the theory and explains the method that is chosen to prove the acts of securitization in the region. In order to identify securitization, one must look into the discourse of the time and analyse words that accelerated differences. Therefore, the section presents the notions of discourse analysis that are applied to the forthcoming chapters. It will also address the issue of the interpretation of symbols and language, how the events were communicated to the public and which stories were emphasized. Additionally, there is a part which explains why the language is a significant designator of causes of the crises.

It is the importance of language and its usage that defined the selection of the methodology. The discursive dimensions of the crises in the South Caucasus were important part of channelling and shaping social relations that made these relations entirely rhetorical (Herzfield, 1997: 141). They created a vernacular that escalated divisions and weaponized the differences. Examining those dimensions will help to unveil the ways toward normalization and the institutionalization of dilemmas. Prevalence of hostile and divisive narratives had shaped the content of the age that was marked by the dissolution of the biggest state in the world and the emergence of new subjects of international law. By studying the language of discontentment, one can reveal “ethnic shifters” (Galaty, 1982: 5) that served as modifiers which fixed the focus on the identity.

3.1. Conceptual Framework

A theory in social science is an accurate and coherent speculation about both the research question and the recommended answer. Consisting of descriptive or causal hypotheses, theories must adhere to prior evidence regarding the question and should not ignore it. Otherwise, it cannot be defined as a theory (Goertz, 2006: 72). King, et al, note that the general notion that a theory is a first step of any research is not always true. It might come first in certain circumstances, but a theory is based on antecedent knowledge and expertise (King et al., 1994: 19). In other words, these two notions are very much intertwined and form a process of accumulation of theoretical and practical skills.

Different events in international politics are divided into various categories and are classified, which may serve several purposes, but the appropriate classification can be driven inductively — applying a bottom-up approach (Sartori, 1970: 1043). Or to explain further, this project will examine the language of discord between the countries and communities. The ladder of abstraction (the prism that defines the application of concepts from a broader to a more specific category) for the research project consists of (1) a broad theory of securitization; (2) ethnicity and history curtailed and fitted into securitization discourse; and (3) the testing of indicators — that is, the definition of trends that constitute the offer of the securitization moves. Giovanni Sartori argues that the logic of “either-or” cannot be substituted by a “more-and-less” alternative, albeit these two logics are “complementary” and both have their own field of application (Sartori, 1970: 1039). It is a researcher’s job to accommodate both approaches and to consider their inter-relation. In other words, an overly black and white categorisation of concepts may not provide accurate findings. Following Sartori’s argument, this thesis will argue that the either/or dichotomies applied to the studies of the South Caucasus need to be accompanied by a complementary knowledge of “more-and-less” or more-or-less. Strict classification of variables makes them mutually exclusive, and a scholar is forced to side with one option without being able to incorporate “greater-lesser” attributes within the argument (Sartori, 1970: 1038). Sartori insists that the two logics of either-or and more-or-less are complementary and have their legitimate field of application (1970: 1039). Because when certain notions or concepts are attributed with power, a specific phenomenon occurs where the nature of the things and materials involved are in more or less measure responsible for the occurring event (Harre, 1970: 273). Perhaps for a researcher it is necessary to be holistic and

acknowledge interplay between variables. Examination of language of discord is an attempt to bridge that divide and emphasize more-or-less indicators. To extend the argument, there is no need to choose between two lines of thought: form and meaning, rather, think about movements which make them communicate (when form acquires meaning or vice versa) indefinitely could be more productive (Derrida, 1982: 173). Thus, if one studies *circulations* of narratives that assigned form and meaning to words, one can produce findings capable of explaining the securitization trend. This research will conduct a qualitative study of those policies and actions that deepened the crisis in the South Caucasus. It aims to fill the scholarly gap that mostly blames geopolitical dimensions of the republics, and bring some equilibrium to the study of these conflicts, that is, leave aside strictly realist or neorealist viewpoints and assign more prominence to agency in relation to structure. In other words, look into the actions of individual actors and nationalist politicians who participated in the escalation of the conflicts in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. As Sartori notes, it is better to be an over-conscious thinker than an unconscious one, as steering the middle ground should be the aim of the research (1970: 1033). If one is totally consumed by the “theory” and “method” than he/she is in danger of becoming unconscious (Sartori, 1970: 1033-34). By engaging in the study of the interactions and narratives of conflict this study will seek that conscious ground that has the capacity to reconceptualise regional divisions.

Building on Sartori’s conceptual approach one has to look into the circulations of narratives that will help to define part of the explanation. An event in international relations is an occurrence that shifted the position of a country, and its consideration implies a decision to find the point of departure for research, as understanding

predisposes the outcome of an explanation (Suganami, 2008: 334). Hidemi Suganami argues that even structural explanations are causal and *processual*, because they explain how a particular process produces a certain outcome, in which case the explanation acquires historical features (Suganami, 2008: 334). Here, three components are essential to analyse the issue: chance coincidences, mechanistic processes and human acts (2008: 334). Suganami argues that referring to this combination is vital for the explanation of events under scrutiny (2008: 334-336). Overall, Suganami refers to chance coincidences, mechanistic processes and relevant human acts and their consequences as key factors for unveiling social phenomena. In order to attain a higher level of understanding, these factors need to be examined and studied in a chosen time frame.

The current research project aims to emphasize neither security nor nationalism, but rather the way in which security and nationalistic problems were contextualized and applied to policymaking. The goal of this thesis is to understand how ethnic differences emerged as a source of insecurity for the newly independent units of the Soviet Union. It posits that insecurities are constructed, and are constitutive of knowledge and action (Bourdieu, 2002: 128-129).

It is also important to note that meta-theories like realism assert states as security actors, and focus on threats to the state. Yet they overlook the populace that constitutes a state, and which shares a stake in security. The warmongering over the status of the three territorial entities in the South Caucasus was largely defined by the grammar and the adjectives selected to define and shape the controversy. This is why it is significant to track the words of those leaders who exercised influence at the time of the collapse of the USSR.

It is political power that draws boundaries and erects walls, not nature (Searle in Booth, 2007: 151). Words such as 'historical' or 'natural' came to be seen in a dogmatic context in the late 1980s. They were assigned to the majority of issues under consideration. It is fundamental to examine the way in which modifiers were attributed to dilemmas and problems in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, all sides suffered from the perhaps "ahistorical" assumption that the state is a categorical and a natural order of affairs, and one that will remain in place forever (Booth, 2007: 189).

Upholding the critical research approach is not an attempt to create new overarching theory, but instead seeks to develop innovative and distinct assemblages by mixing and experimenting methods, concepts and empirical evidence, which allow for the reinvigoration of perceptions that were previously acclaimed as "granted" (Aradau et al., 2015: 9). What is important for this study is to acknowledge the second layer of conflicts, and to research agency through the mix of analytical tools and methods. This research looks for a new way of problematizing the issue through practices and processes that have conditioned political activity and, later on, brought parties to military actions.

In fact, this research project will help to dissect the political practices that were at the disposal of political entrepreneurs in the 1980s. Political practices here mean the entirety of ideas, nationalism, and history, coordinated together so as to produce narratives that helped reinforce feeling of insecurity. Frightened communities were more vulnerable to mobilisation and calls for othering.

3.2.Securitization – theoretical framework

For further facilitation of the research, one has to refer to the theory of securitization which allows the researcher to bridge the interdisciplinary boundaries and look beyond established conditions of political power. The concept of securitization was developed by the Copenhagen School, the group of scholars who reified the meaning and outcome of security within political discourse. They separated the traditional understanding of security from its political application and came up with the notion of securitization, which could be defined as doing security with discursive means.¹³ Developed in the 1980s, the theory has acquired significance as it combines constructivist and Schmittian elements and accentuates the role of discourse in politics. It stands at the intersection of three strains of IR theory — realism, poststructuralism and constructivism (Balzacq et al., 2016: 518). It was derived from the idea of societal security, which was a response to a number of national conflicts from the 1980s and was defined as “the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” (Buzan and Hansen, 2011: 213). The state used to be the referent object for military, political, environment and economic security, but now ‘society’ has become a referent object of societal security — which, however, advanced the studies of ‘identity security’ in the settings where states and societies had clashed, or where other political actors had mobilised society against perceived threats (Buzan and Hansen, 2011: 213).

Being in the middle of the theory, societal security did experience a certain ambiguity, as it focused on two levels: state and society. Yet later, this vagueness was resolved when the discursive dimension of security was outlined (Buzan and

¹³ Similar to Clausewitzian definition of war as continuation of politics by other means

Hansen, 2011: 213). Now securitization depended on three main pillars — speech act theory, the Schmittian understanding of security and exceptional politics, and traditionalist security debates, which emphasises authority, precisely on the confronting and construction of threats, and a capacity to make decisions and adopt appropriate measures (Buzan and Hansen, 2011: 213-14, Balzacq et al., 2016: 496-497). In other words, security has acquired a discursive dimension with the ability to do things (see Wæver in the forthcoming paragraphs) making it the specialist theory for understanding conflicts.

The notion of securitization has undergone various different interpretations. For Stefano Guzzini it is an analytical tool, a conceptual move, an empirical theory and a political theory of security (2011: 332). For Buzan et al. (1998), securitization is the move that drives politics “beyond the established rules of the game” and makes it part of special politics or reifies it altogether (1998: 23). This analytical framework will be applied to understand and interpret the following ideas and speech acts that have radicalised communities. Didier Bigo considers securitization as a “capacity” or potential of management. He interprets security as a process of the securitization/insecuritization of borders, identities and of the conception of orders; as a result, securitization is transformed into a tool for controlling security or insecurity (Bigo, 2000: 173-174). The choice is between particular actors who shape the structure of events in a given case. Yet any actor or group of actors that possesses the capabilities to control security space or the insecurities of a population at the same time has the power to influence the dominant narrative about threats and risks.

Jef Huysmans draws attention to securitization in the power-knowledge nexus. Yet at the same time he indicates that much more could be studied if

attention is shifted to the management of security utterances through an institutional and symbolic context (2002: 52). In power discourse, threats and security are the primary commodities that can ensure public attention. The choice of the *right* symbols constructs rules that govern the securitized issue. It is up to the agents to “make” security by allocating definitions (Huysmans, 2002: 42). For example, one can securitize migration statistics and announce that growing a number of foreign workers threatens national security, whilst ignoring the input they make to the economy and to society in general. The degree to which political actors dominate public discourse gives a normative dimension to the language of power and security. Hence, placing an emphasis on power and the governance of security will allow social constructivists to get more in-depth knowledge about security formation and its role in social practices (Huysmans, 2002: 60).

Explaining the concept further, one must mention Ken Booth’s interpretation of security as a derivative concept or, as he puts it, a distinct behaviour and an attitude linked to security which are interpreted differently across political theories (2007: 160). He states that the mainstream policies in strategic studies “derive” from a particular social context (2007: 150). Semantic shifts do make a difference, and transform the context and the meaning of the discourse: if conventional realists talk of “European Security”, for example, another configuration (e.g. “Security in Europe”) might spark a very different train of thought (2007: 150). Mostly the issue is about the meaning that is agreed by a community or within a state. There is one world, but many realities that are “facts by human agreement”, hence, strategic policies are forged by human agreements rather than a genetic predisposition to conflict (Booth, 2007: 150).

Securitization theory does not see a threat in any particular issue; rather, the meaning and content applied to a particular topic shapes the security discourse. Discursive politics makes problems out of security. Security both constructs, and is constructed by, language — more specifically, by moving from representational utterances to a performative view (Huysmans, 2002: 60). A securitization process is not only an abandonment of rules or the creation of threats, it is an activity in which “existential threats legitimise the breaking of rules” (Balzacq, 2011b: 1). It is an act that reconfigures the state of affairs, and it places the power in-between humans as it explains security to be the quality of handling a challenge rather than a threat itself (Wæver, 2011: 468). As Wæver explains that securitization is the theory that looks for power in the things that are internal to a community (2011: 468). The clarification offered by Buzan et al. indicates that securitization is not always a “civilised discussion” but rather the order always consists of coercion as well as consent, and can “never be imposed” (Buzan et al., 1998: 25). In other words, the suggestion is that the analysis must exclude the possibility of imposition. Securitization is dependent on the capacity of actors to “constitute statistics” about the aim and assign their own categories to that aim, they have to create “truth” that will be in accordance with the public knowledge of an issue and offer a “hierarchy of threats” (Bigo, 2000: 195). In this case, statistics means the science of the state or the dimensions and factors of power (Foucault, 1991a: 96) that allow us to measure the state according to certain principles, creating a hierarchy of values. However, as indicated in the introduction, “imposition”, for the purpose of this research, means the creation of certain circumstances: e.g. the closure of an information space to alternative views. Here this thesis examines a case when securitization theory is applied to a non-democratic order and thus requires some “stretching” of the

concept (Vuori, 2008). Conceptual stretching implies a loosening of the concepts when they involve new cases, i.e. a number of empirical studies are added together, and the concepts are relaxed by using fewer attributes. In other words, when applying a concept to a study, a researcher can exclude some attributes that are deemed necessary in typical cases. The securitization may vary depending on a regime of values that are emphasized for achieving the purpose. That is, every regime highlights the values it holds most dear (Vuori, 2008: 69); in this case, the values are history and ethnicity. Extension of this concept will help to reveal the grey zones rather than employing a realpolitik interpretation of the conflicts.

Wilkinson argues that going beyond *what* security means to *how* security means is central for scholarship (2011: 97). In other words, the examination of events has to include an answer as to how they occurred. The patterns of securitization often reveal the interests of political actors and make it possible to analyse the environment that created and escalated the conflict. Consequently, study of the language and construction of a narrative allows scholars to situate and interpret the events in the relevant context. The language of a conflict is not a given variable, but a process that is shaped and reshaped by the words and gestures of participating actors. The meaning allocated to the words and utterances translate them into discontent. However, this does not mean that scholars seek to impose a theory upon the people; rather, it emanates from the assumption that the “local perspectives” enable us to ponder “other cultural formulations” that serve as an anthology of accumulated knowledge and experience that will enrich the existing studies (2011: 97). Addressing the semantics of the conflict allows for a greater comprehension of violence in general. An understanding of “cultural formulations”,

which are the products of discourse, might also explain why realist interpretations tend to prevail.

Wilkinson explains that securitization theory is far from an “unproblematic” use of empirical data, which produces a theoretically consistent story but is unable to reflect local conditions and dynamics in a meaningful way (Wilkinson, 2011: 99). He warns that the application of the securitization theory might produce an edited version of events and analysis risks erasing “local knowledge” that can be generated through fieldwork and empirical examination (Wilkinson, 2011: 96). By applying this theory, the research might limit itself to normative assumptions in the form of a “Westphalian straitjacket” that implies the global validity of the Euro-American model of state (2011: 96). Despite a risk of producing an “edited” sequence of events, securitization theory does help to reflect the local conditions as it focuses on narratives. Additionally, one has to remember that the local actors used the West as a model, as a template of their future political system. In the light of their Western aspirations, it is important to emphasize that the new political movements admired European culture and values as they were abandoning the Soviet concepts. Hence, the Westphalian system was considered to be a better and more acceptable alternative compared to the Soviet model.

The current research identifies those local conditions that cultivated hostility in the region. Historic narratives and hostile discourses had designed the social reality of the republics in 1980s. Application of this theory will unveil the influence that narratives produced and how they contributed to the securitization of the political scene. Securitization theory will be stretched, in other words, to illuminate the performatives that securitized particular events, issues and ethnicities. Local

views will not be lost because of the observations that have been collected across the decades. Political decisions, actions and/or inactions were context-specific, and this study will not ignore that aspect during its analysis. This research will incorporate the radical views that nationalists presented to their constituents and how the independence battle was fought along ethnic lines. It is very important to emphasize that Westphalian order was widely welcomed by the nationalists, who seemed to admire the Western idea of the nation-state. In the nationalists' understanding, then-Soviet republics had to become independent nation-states; however, they also thought that dominant ethnic groups had to have more rights.¹⁴ The USSR was a hybrid version of the state with a nationalist regime, which was totally incompatible with the organizational model of a nation-state (Brubaker, 2003: 29). In other words, the Soviet founders mixed and matched concepts that were difficult to merge when they defined component parts of the citizenry in national terms, whilst the state and citizenship as a whole was not placed in the wide national framework (Brubaker, 2003: 29). As Brubaker rightly points out, the USSR invented nationhood on the sub-state level but did nothing to institutionalize it at the state level (2003: 29). This study will demonstrate how a securitization theory can deconstruct the narratives and help to understand the discursive side of the conflicts in the South Caucasus.

Wilkinson addresses the context of securitization as a level of analysis that can be used in the studies of securitization (Wilkinson, 2011: 96). Indeed, there is a risk of distorting the trajectories of securitization, however it will not be an "edited" version of the events that are fitted into the theoretical framework. This research

¹⁴ Georgian nationalists talked about democracy and Western values, however they also did not wish to acknowledge the rights of Abkhaz and Ossetians within sovereign Georgia. The fine line between liberalism and oppression was blurred.

project will interpret the language of enmity through a securitization lens, and explain how the disagreements were constructed and managed. Building on that argument it will be possible to partially answer why confrontations had escalated causing widespread crisis with such far-reaching consequences.

In addition to securitization theory, this thesis will refer to critical security studies. One must note that this thesis does not treat security as a given object or a value, but, as critical security studies interprets it, security is a practice that creates the “securitiness” (securitiness is not a value approach) of situations (Aradau et al., 2015: 3). This is because, for an issue to become a security concern, institutional, political, technological and other actions are performed to place it into the security basket (Aradau et al., 2015: 3). The methods and approaches to creating insecurity vary across societies and states, as some opt for speech acts, some mobilize the public by manipulation of vulnerabilities in social and political life and choose it as a dominant political tactic (Aradau et al., 2015: 3). For the purpose of this research, one has to consider security is looked at from a critical perspective that implies understanding of practice including discourses, ideas, power relationships, bodies of knowledge, techniques of government and interactions between them (Aradau et al., 2015: 3).

Despite the Copenhagen School’s firm position on securitization, Karin Fierke questions how the success or failure of securitization could be defined if it depends on the ability to convince the audience which she considers as unaccounted for in the theory (2015: 114-15). Another aspect of the critique comes from Paul Roe, who thinks that e.g. Aradau accentuates the Schmittian aspects but does not pay enough attention to the ‘positive’ side of securitization (2012: 250). Insisting that wars are

not necessarily an outcome of securitization, he presents a normatively positive securitization where recognizing the value of human equality can help to re-engage with the normativity of securitization (2012: 260, Fierke, 2015: 115). One should not argue that all cases of securitization end up with war, but it is that lack of acknowledging human equality that alienates parties, and, despite Roe suggesting that 'others' are 'selves' (2012: 260), one must pay more attention to the distal context that in fact frequently contains the most important aspects of securitization that make it impossible to engage with normativity.

Another point in the criticism of the theory is the fixed conceptualization of identity compared to a constructed one, but one must analytically separate the process of identity constitution and identity fortification; because identities function as fixed concepts within security discourse (Buzan and Hansen, 2011: 215), they do not emerge without a specific narrative. If one looks closer, all identities are constructs and co-constructs of previously constructed beliefs and ideas. Yet despite the criticism, securitization "developed a broad and powerful research agenda of significance across the field of security" (Williams, 2003: 511). Overall, the securitization theory helps to find and outline those identities which are preferred during the political discourse of securitization. Certain political actors select the identities that are considered to be vulnerable and which build the narrative of threat or enmity. It might be argued that those multiple dimensions and pillars that constitute the theory make it more adaptable and flexible for research of political conflicts and their discursive paradigm.

The organization of discourse and the calls for mobilisation along ethnic lines were instrumental in constructing rivalries across the South Caucasus. Discursive

approach permits close analysis of nationalist language, which was a leading voice during the dissolution of the USSR. Following the securitization theory is helpful because of its distinct feature: that it does not test “regularities” but instead puts emphasis on “a distinct rationality and political operation” that makes it possible to understand them (Wæver, 2011: 471). By choosing to focus on the political discourse of the discontent, it will be possible to study the grammar of social and political differentiation. Existential challenges to the future of former republics were created with words and utterances, which formed public opinion and secured consent for violent actions. Thus, this thesis chooses to study securitising moves, actions and actors during the process. This study will measure the causal power of discourses within the escalation of tensions in the South Caucasus. Securitization theory is capable of analysing the meta-narrative of threat and offers a “snap-shot” of the dominant public narrative at the given time (Wilkinson, 2011: 114). This analysis will follow an account of hostile language and reshape the prevailing evaluations of enmity in the region. It will allow scholars to re-classify the aims of political discourse at the given period.

3.2.1. Securitization as acts

Ole Wæver outlines three “felicitous” conditions needed for a securitization move to be successful: (1) the grammar or plot of security; (2) the social capital of the enunciator; and (3) threat-related conditions (in Vuori, 2008: 70). However, Vuori argues that there is another condition essential for the action: the audience of securitization. To be more specific, he notes that not everybody entitled to speak is equally privileged to form the “structured field of practices” i.e. security (Vuori, 2008:

70). There is a competition over the production of truth between the actors (nationalists) as they transform social space in the field of power and aim to “homogenise” the ways of identifying a problem and contend “to define a ‘focus’” that will be shared by everyone (Bigo, 2000: 196).

For Wæver, the utterance of the word “security” is an act in itself, which means that, by merely mentioning the word, something is done which makes it a “speech act” (in Balzacq, 2011b: 1). According to Balzacq, the main locus of the Copenhagen School implies that some speech acts describe or perhaps distort reality, but they cannot be simply false or true; instead they “do” things, i.e. they are “performatives” rather than “constatives” that merely report the developments. Balzacq defines this approach as “philosophical”. However, Balzacq argues that the sociological realm of securitization including practices and power relations contributes to the construction of threats (Balzacq, 2011b: 1). The philosophical view reduces securitization to a “*conventional procedure*” in which “*felicity circumstances*” [sic] (conditions which define the success of speech act) must prevail; whereas the sociological view elaborates on securitization as a strategic process, in which the context, the psycho-cultural character of the audience and the power of a speaker and a listener all interact (Balzacq, 2011b: 1-2). To be more specific, the strategic action of discourse acts at the level of persuasion using a variety of artefacts including metaphors, emotions stereotypes and even lies to reach the target audience (Balzacq, 2011b: 1). The securitization divide between strategic and speech act views simultaneously differentiate between “pragmatics” and “universal pragmatics”. The first (pragmatics) address language usage and the last (universal

pragmatics) the fundamental principles (rules) implied in the communicative action (Balzacq, 2011b: 1).

In the sociological understanding, performatives are “situated actions mediated by agents” (*habitus*), in other words, they are the results of communicative practices and power games within the social space. Securitization is a different type of agency which is “temporarily constructed engagement” by actors of a distinctive structural environment, which, utilizing the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, reproduce and transform structures which are aimed to respond to the problems caused by a changing historical situation (Balzacq, 2011b: 2). As Jacques Derrida explains further, a performative is a “communication” which does not essentially limit itself to transporting an already constituted semantic content that has its own aim for truth (1982: 322). Political agents assign content according to a particular matter, and have a tendency to amend truth. In other words, language has an ideological goal, and is adjusted according to the situation.

The audience is important for both approaches to securitization, but there is a slight difference in each: for the philosophical approach the audience is a given, formal category; but for sociological practitioners there is a process of the mutual constitution of securitising actors and the audience (Balzacq, 2011b: 2). Balzacq argues that securitization is an intersubjective process and thus offers a slightly amended definition, which will be applied to the current study:

Securitization *is an assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilised by a securitising actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and*

intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitising actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development (Balzacq, 2011b: 2) [italic is original].

The study of securitization is a study of discourse and political constellations, where the *definition* and *criteria* of securitization is made up by the “intersubjective establishment of an existential threat” which has a sufficiently important political effect (Buzan et al., 1998: 25). This empirical study, as with any other study of the social world, must “abstract from the total social context”, but at the same time it must have a theoretical connotation as to how to “reintegrate” the abstracted elements (Wight, 2006: 288). To borrow from Wight, different theories explain the same patterns differently, but have distinct levels of structural understanding (2006: 288). Therefore, “abstracts” will realign the understanding of obtaining public unanimity.

This research project will use discourse analysis in order to determine to what extent reality was imagined and constructed in the history of the South Caucasus. Discourses and narratives became vehicles for the propagation of ideas about threats to the public. Thorough investigations of these means of communication will provide us with new explanatory tools. It is significant to investigate what ‘security’ actually meant in the context of the time, and how this meaning was produced and communicated. By conducting three case studies separately, this research project will allow us to demonstrate the shared problems and trends of alienation. It will avoid adopting a “unique” position or approach to the topic (King et al., 1994: 42,

Wight, 2006); all events are unique, and thus different from all other occurrences, though the real question is whether it is possible to identify the key features contributing to that particular social reality — in other words to emphasize the *right* facts from the millions out there (King et al., 1994: 42)(italic my own). As King et al. note, the challenge of *simplification* is an important vulnerability (1994: 42) facing the researcher. However, they acknowledge the importance of systematic simplification in the research process. Being a researcher is to be both general and specific — consolidating knowledge about classes of events as well as events in particular places/spaces (King et al., 1994: 42). In other words, a researcher has to be at once both timeless and bounded by time; and these two goals or targets are leaning more to words being mutually supportive rather than opposing although they vary on a case by case basis (King et al., 1994: 43). A turbulent period of the USSR's demise clashed with the meaning allocated to history, which requires a researcher to remember the parts of a story that were left behind by the active discourse. One has to engage with the period of discontent as well as the history that has assigned a different meaning to conflicts. For King et al. the best way to understand an event is to use scientific inference and to research systematic patterns in similar parallel events.

Here the project will follow this methodological suggestion. These three case studies have both general and specific patterns, and took place almost simultaneously during the break-up of the Soviet hierarchy. The problem they faced was the adjustment to anarchy.¹⁵ The national movements mostly focused on symbols like sovereignty and territorial integrity, leaving no room for societies to

¹⁵ In the terms of the English School

participate in the debate. The South Caucasus polities, and accordingly their policies, are mostly governed along emotional or affective lines. Hence, few undertakings or practices are institutionalised. The actors base their decisions on emotional rather than rational choices, and as a result halt the institutionalisation of rules and practices. It will try to emphasize the leverage and implications that securitization has had, and continues to impose on the security in the region.

3.2.2. Performatives

Certain words and ideas propagated by nationalist leaders have acquired the power of performative utterance (Austin, 1975: 6), i.e., their speeches have transformed social reality. By stating words and applying adjectives they performed the acts that had wider consequences. It does not matter whether they be commands, questions, wishes, warnings or assertions; they say something (the locutionary act), and at the same time they do things by saying (the illocutionary act), and finally, they yield effects by saying (i.e. the perlocutionary act) (Ricoeur, 1976: 14). In order to explain this phenomenon and how speech acts influenced the discourse, one must look into performatives, the words that imply action and do the things for enunciators. The performatives depict how power is transmitted and produced by words or political statements and actions.

It is the illocutionary act that distinguishes a promise and an order, and becomes a distinctive “force” by using specific “grammar”, creating a “dialectical unity of the event and the meaning” in speech (Ricoeur, 1976: 11). As Michael Herzfeld argues, a sign becomes an icon only after someone uses it that way and

others agree to accept that particular understanding of the notion or a word (1997: 57). To be more precise, this thesis seeks for meaning(s) allocated to the interpretation of social and political challenges in 1980s. Those acts were “*ascribed responsibility*” and a society was able to locate agency (Wæver, 2011: 473). Taking the long view, this work wishes to argue that it is not the ethnic distinctions that are central, but rather their definition and interpretation. It offers a perception-based analysis of the events where the new understanding derived from the perceptions and fears of nationalist party leaders and their allies.

As Bourdieu argues, the social sciences deal with pre-named and pre-classified realities, and they need to focus on the process of naming and defining those events and the practices that created them (2002: 105). When agents use words they become actions, as the speech concentrates on the symbolic capital of the group which is represented. Bourdieu argues that a performative utterance is successful only when a person with the authority or “power” pronounces it (Bourdieu, 2002: 111). In other words, a person with the authority to speak has the capacity to shape public opinion. A performative utterance is a political “pre-vision” and at the same time a “pre-diction” which will carry out the programme it voices (2002: 111). Bourdieu notes that, in crisis situations, the “constitutive power” of language increases due to “extra-ordinary” discourse that dominates the “paradoxical” events (Bourdieu, 2002: 128).

Language and the discourse of separation have caused social rifts and escalated conflicts over the status and borders in the post-Soviet South Caucasus, and they were the products of a politics that produced *othering* images between neighbours. The nationalist political leaders had the ability to control the general

discourse concerning politics and ideology, and their power thus shaped public opinion. Social practice formed by this hostile discourse changed and radicalized the reality of the public's political views. It determined the social structure that instigated war among communities.

There were political actors facing challenges as they communicated with the public about the new system that was to replace the USSR. For a re-assessment of that period, one has to study the language of communications and politicians' attitudes in crisis situations. The entire discourse of independence, nationalism and ethnicity was securitized in the period. It was the attempt to mobilise public support for the independence or self-determination, and at the same time to secure power. They spoke of ethnicity, national unity, historic justice and security that organized the discourse of the post-soviet political system along divisive lines. Along with the "security" of a nation, ethnic belonging was also an articulation that mobilised the audience. Ethnic origin acquired a normative dimension that was a security issue accepted by the public. As nationalists considered ethnicity to be the central point in the post-Soviet order it became an essential part of security discourse. In other words, ethnicity was the main denominator of a nation — the public demanded its defence whilst the political actors used history and myths to magnify the importance of ethnicity.

This research project concerns the language of nationalists and freedom fighters that shaped and formed the post-Soviet polity. Debate launched by nationalists was hostile, and it intensified divisions. In essence, the dominant discourse emphasized only separating patterns and ignored everything that was common among the communities. Those perplexities are best manifested in the

discourse of conflicts and divisions that defined social and political life as well as redrew the map of the region. The ideas and articulations that constitute social reality are capable of providing better explanations for critical researchers.

The narrative that was presented to the public inflamed emotions that targeted nation and pride, which had been largely suppressed by the Soviet authorities for decades. On the one hand, this discourse guaranteed the acquisition of power; however, it also became a dangerous trigger of alienation. Images and discourses of threat are routinely designed by particular political actors who struggle against other groups from a given position of power (Stritzel and Schmittchen, 2011: 171). Accordingly, the alienation of ethnicities and production of threat images incorporate the language that result from sociolinguistic, social, political and cultural processes, ones that define the context of a society (Stritzel and Schmittchen, 2011: 171). Radical nationalistic narratives helped nationalist leaders and parties to redirect the attention of the public from the grave consequences of the economic collapse of the USSR to the symbolic capital that precipitated their rise to power.

For political actors across the South Caucasus, the linguistic reservoir was empowered by historic narratives and security discourses that allowed them to securitize neighbours and minorities. They misinterpreted legal requirements that were prompted by the dissolution of preceding legislative order, i.e. the constitution of the Soviet Union. This study will argue that the result of the crisis was defined by the way that it was “symbolized” giving the ideological interpretation to differences (Žižek in Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 3). It will suggest that security and its consequent challenges are social constructs that are activated when a securitizing move is facilitated by a context that ‘selects’ specific aspects of the concept leaving

out others (Vultee, 2011: 81). Nationalistic narratives had redirected the legislative and constitutional uncertainties toward hostility. The dissolution of the USSR was “symbolized” in a divisive and exclusive way that resulted in full-scale wars in Georgia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. By focusing on the analysis of the narrative, one chooses to outline the *why* question that can reveal the experience behind the story — which parts of the plot were included and which ignored (Riessman, 1993: 2).

It is still not clear whether the imposition of narratives was a goal itself or a means to a further goal — the acquisition of power. Yet the semantics illustrates that pattern. Freedom was perhaps a goal, but it conveniently supported the desire of the nationalists to make a grab for power. This research will offer a re-invigoration of the interpretation of the symbols that collided with one another and transformed co-habitation into rivalry and hostility.

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Discourse Analysis

Discourse is a social use of language in a social context (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 81). Society is produced and reproduced by the use or abuse of language (Fairclough, 2001: 19). Spoken words affect the way communities are organized and perceive daily dilemmas. Language is the ultimate instrument that organizes politics, by assigning meaning to words and directing disputes. Language and discourse have had a remarkable, if not a crucial influence on the entire process of confrontation in these regions. Michel Foucault has the structuralist understanding of words as a

mediating presence between objects in the world and thoughts in our minds, that words have to epitomize thoughts, while at the same time he stresses that representation in this case is reciprocal, that is: “language represents thought as thought represents itself” (2001: 86). Language and words on both sides of the confrontation, in all three cases, collided and clashed. Harsh rhetoric and historic narratives dominated the scene, and if it is assumed that “language is an analysis of thought” with the power to establish order in space (Foucault, 2001: 91), then one must consider the role and influence of language and representation in the South Caucasus. The aim of this section is to outline the method that will help to trace the formation of this narrative. By integrating discourse analysis, frame analysis and notions of symbolic power, one can understand the link between the discursive practices and armed confrontation.

As a main method for the deconstruction of the speech acts and actions/decisions/inactions, discourse analysis will be applied. Discourse theory seeks new interpretations of practices through their meaning whilst analysing the techniques and strategies that political forces and social actors utilise to construct “meanings within incomplete and decidable social structures” (Buzan et al., 1998: 25). Discourse theory examines these practices and utterances in larger historical and social contexts, paving the way to the critique and transformation of existing practices and meanings (Howarth, 2000: 129). It is a “constitutive theory” as it includes a framework of “consistently related concepts” conjoined with a social ontology that offers a common language for the description, interpretation and assessment of social phenomena (Howarth, 2000: 129). Discourse analysis offers the theoretical and methodological tools that allow us to conduct a well-founded critical

examination of social problems, power and inequality (Dijk, 1997: 32). Language means and is observable and it creates symbolic content that has to be observed and researched (Teubert, 2010: 77). Wolfgang Teubert argues that discourse is the collective mind that could be inspected and investigated, and, because of this, the discourse is more real than the reality which is often taken for granted (2010: 108). He argues that it is discourse that can help us to tell who is the freedom fighter or a terrorist, as it is the contributions to discourse that are shared and available for interpretation (Teubert, 2010: 108). Thus, the examination of narratives offers a clearer picture of an event than would otherwise be attainable. Discourse involves conditions that could be formulated as the “*social conditions of production and social conditions of interpretation*” [italics original] (Fairclough, 2001: 20). Such social conditions correlate with three different levels of social organization that inevitably shape the production and interpretation of discourse, as they define an immediate social environment wherein discourse takes place, the level of the social institution that creates a “wider matrix” for the discourse and, the level of society as whole (2001: 21).

As mentioned earlier, the problem (its genealogy) is a product of mutually implicating/constituting units — structures and agency. Thus, discourse analysis will allow us to evaluate particular interpretations of socially constructed phenomena (Howarth, 2000: 129). Words and their collocations create political reality. Politicians exploit the potential that is inherent in the polysemy of the legitimate language, that is, the multiple meanings that can be allocated to concepts that legitimize controversial discourse (Howarth, 2000: 130). The ‘grammar’¹⁶ of the

¹⁶ Clauses and provisions that govern a conflicting discourse

conflict holds the clue to the divisions between states and their organizational principles. This grammar serves those in power, as it is not nature that creates “silent majorities”, “poor people” or “the powerless”; it is politics that silences, disenfranchises, and disempowers (Foucault, 1991b: 64). Accordingly, security is a product of grammar too; it is made up of utterances, silences and ignorance (Booth, 2007: 160). The “linguistic market”, as borrowed from Bourdieu, allocates more and more meaning to each sign in a language and forms a political marketplace where, during “revolutionary situations, common words take an opposite meaning” and securitise any available issue (Bakhtin in Bourdieu, 1991: 40). Words are the very texture of actions, and their meaning predisposes what people do, how they do it and why they do it. Bourdieu notes that the autonomy and specific logic of language, combined with particular rules of operation, needs to be taken into account by social scientists (1991: 40). The selection of words used by nationalists, including the number of superlative adjectives in mobilising speeches as well as patriotic songs, had an opposite meaning during the securitization process in the South Caucasus. It might be considered that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a “revolutionary situation” that bred discontent and changed the meaning of speech and actions. Thus language, and its possibilities, were fully mobilised by political actors.

National definitions of identity emphasized the psychological consequences of in-group/out-group distinctions, and at the same time triggered an inflation of threats, as well as enhanced national solidarity, through the dehumanisation of other groups (Booth, 2007: 242). Such methods, including the inflation of threats and the stereotyping of other groups, help to mobilize popular support, and the state, the intellectuals, protectionists and the military paint the world in Hobbesian terms

(Snyder, 1993: 93). As a result, the process of mobilization that causes war is conducted through words and utterances and these utterances therefore need greater scrutiny.

As hermeneutical approaches have become substantial in the light of greater concern about the meaning of language, it is instrumental to explore that meaning (Snyder, 1993: 93). This research shall consider “designative connections” that assign meaning to words (Taylor, 1985: 216). Language is not a mere “assemblage of words”, but the capacity to speak (express/realize) the reflective awareness implicit in using words to say something, and these words form a type of web (1985: 226). By speaking, one touches parts of a web which then resonate across the whole, as the words only have sense because of their place in the whole web (Taylor, 1985: 230-31). What was said and done by the leaders in the South Caucasus resonated across the region, and determined the foreign and security policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia for years to come. The nationalist delirium ended up being a costly undertaking for each side in the disputes.

The world of our making (Onuf, 1989) is created by speaking. Words create the symbolic power that, through utterances, make people see and believe the vision offered, and enables the holders of that power to “obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force [only] by virtue of the specific effect of mobilisation”; additionally, this power can be exercised when it receives recognition, i.e. when it is accepted by its audience (Bourdieu, 1991: 41). Therefore, this research project deconstructs the speeches and discourses antecedent to conflicts and statements made during the clashes. The evaluation of words and the actions that followed will help to analyse the entire process of securitization. Bourdieu thinks that it is the

“belief in the legitimacy” of words which empowers those who speak rather than words alone having the power (Bourdieu, 1991: 170). It could be said that it is a process of mutual constitution, the words, their agency empowers and brings legitimacy. Security-focused and nationalistic utterances garnered support that was gradually exchanged into a legitimating currency. This thesis seeks to describe, understand and explain these processes. It will present explanation as a supplement to understanding, and delineate a distinctive interpretation (Bourdieu, 1991: 170). This research will reveal how these mobilising speeches and practices have amended the security of the region.

The meaning allocated to words endows individuals with the power to manipulate and form public opinion. Examining the discourses that influence public opinion will help this project to answer the research question as to whether political narratives contributed to the escalation of differences in the South Caucasus. To support this assertion, my research project will elaborate on the discourse of local nationalist leaders (activists and intelligentsia) and their followers that helped to radicalise people. When fear is an intrinsic part of daily life it “produces sterility”, as people stop expressing what they think, and they start to think in “reference to their critics” rather than to the facts (Lippmann, 1920: 20). Public opinion was blockaded, as societies were unable to judge freely the imposed narratives about ethnic belonging and supremacy. Lippmann argues that socially toxic thoughts force people to focus on the threat instead of cultivating their own ideas (Lippmann, 1920: 20).

Discourse is not an area where subjectivity arises suddenly, but rather it is a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions (Foucault, 2001: 91). Political discourse is not a system of language or of rules of grammar, but of the “law”

of the existence of language and grammar rules — that which made those statements possible, the condition of their emergence and their correlations with simultaneous events (Foucault, 1991b: 58). It is about the trajectory of declarations and the precepts that made them acceptable. Further, and following Foucault's explanation, studying discourse stipulates the examination of the set of rules at the given time for a given society that expounds: (a) the limits and forms of "what is sayable" (i.e. what is the domain of discourse?); (b) the limits and forms of "conversation" or utterances designed to affect memory or that need to be repressed or censored; (c) the limits and forms of memory, or which words are recognized as valid or invalid; (d) the limits and forms of "reactivation", or in other words, utterances that are foreign or date back to previous epochs, how they are transformed or transmuted; (e) the limits and forms of appropriation or who has the access to the discourse, which groups are the audience and who are the speakers; and whether there is a class struggle between actors for control of discourse (Foucault, 1991b: 59).

Foucault suggests that discourse has to be addressed as a "*monument*" rather than a document,¹⁷ and it is necessary to investigate the conditions of its existence and to relate discourse to a practical field in which it is deployed (Foucault, 1991b: 60). In particular, the scopes of discourses produced by political actors in the South Caucasus were monuments that had a long-term impact on societies and social discourses for years to come. They emerged as a result of myths and flawed theories used in Soviet scholarship, and they became possible because the government

¹⁷ Foucault uses Georges Canguilhem's argument about documents that become monuments because of their significance. By monuments, Foucault means artifacts, events or ideas that acquire significance.

allowed the free expression of thoughts and ideas. In other words, the ‘truths’ that were based on a dubious interpretation of history were the building blocks of those “monuments” that were erected to abet nationals who sought power and influence in the new reality. To further clarify, Foucault’s point is to look at any practice through the scope of the discourse that it comprehends, so that if one looks into the history of discursive practices, certain dependencies can be unveiled (1991b: 60-61).

3.2.1.1. Method of discourse analysis

If the previous section helped to identify what discourse is, here one has to outline the methods that are applied to define those discourses and analyse them. For this study, one must focus on performatives in the speeches and language of political actors and the intellectual elite. *Fine analysis* will be chosen, which focuses on context, the surface of a text, and rhetorical means (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 28). When a study aims to research the ways in which “some speakers or writers exercise power in or by their discourse”, the study must pay attention to properties that can vary as a function of social power:

- Speech acts — a statement, promise, threat, warning or a question that does multiple things simultaneously and assigns multiple values to one [speech] act (Fairclough, 2001: 130)
- Rhetorical figures
- Topic choice (historical topics were chosen to ‘unite’ people)
- Lexical style (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 29)

When addressing rhetoric, one must note that it is used as a Foucauldian notion of “creating truth”, when political discourse appeals to emotions and social instincts (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 56).

When analysing the speeches and texts or newspaper articles the main method will be critical discourse analysis (CDA). The method assumes that the relationship between text and social structures is indirect but mediated by discourse (Fairclough, 2001: 117). Without interpretation and explanation, the ideological properties or background of the speeches are not visible to an observer (Fairclough, 2001: 118). Critical discourse analysis studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (van Dijk, 2008: 85). As Teun van Dijk notes, such evaluation aims to present a different “mode” or “perspective” of theorizing an issue, because discourse has social value and influences, and is influenced by, social structures and interactions (2008: 85-86).

The main principles of the critical discourse analysis assume that:

- Power relations are discursive
- Discourse constitutes society and culture
- Discourse does ideological work
- Discourse is historical
- The link between text and society is mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory

- Discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough and Wodak in van Dijk, 2008: 86)

Hence the empirical chapters in this thesis will address the ideological, historic, and cultural context of the speeches and actions. Their interpretation will explain the power of discourse and how it affected the political reality at the time.

Additionally, when addressing the analysis of discourses, this research will look into the “situational context”, which questions the examination of the event (what is going?); participation (who is involved?); relationships (power relations and social distance enacted in the event); and finally, what is the role of the language? (Fairclough, 2001: 122-124). Such an approach will guide the reader in understanding the various dimensions of the disputes and their relation to emergence of conflicts.

Another method that will be applied to the study is framing, which casts interpretative perspective on the social interactions (Lindekilde, 2014: 196). One has to pay attention to the actors as “signifying agents” who possess a crucial role in interpreting protest and defining the goals as they (actors) are not just the carriers of ideology (Lindekilde, 2014). In other words, the individuals who transmit the ideology to the public and gain their support for securitization need to be studied. Framing the discourse in this way reveals the relationship between the text and its broader context (Lindekilde, 2014: 196). It emphasizes how ideological constructs and ideas are strategically applied to “frame” a particular topic — like a picture frame that puts something into the spotlight, hides other things, and in a certain way shifts reality (Lindekilde, 2014: 200). In other words, the method allows the researcher and the reader to focus on issues that are “in frame” that produce mental scripts helping

the recognition of occurrence (Goffman, 1974: 21). Highlighting frames in speech acts explains their political (in certain cases, even historical) context. Paying attention to words that “frame” the issue will help to define the symbols that were produced for mobilisation.

After considering extracts in the empirical chapters of this thesis, one can understand their meaning by scrutinising the words that had the crucial significance in the communication of meaning. Fairclough and Fairclough suggest that the arguments offered involve descriptions, narratives, as well as explanations of the context in order to provide reasons in support of a particular course of action (2012: 7). Following their observation, this study will look into the words that were used to support hostile sentiments. This approach will help to explain why the nationalist discourse about history or justice superseded all other voices. This approach shows how the actors had relied on (a) constructive strategies — aiming at the creation of national identities; (b) justificatory strategies — aiming at the conservation and reproduction of identities (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 18).

3.2.2. Interpretation

In this thesis, the interpretative approach features the ability to use multiple perspectives and analyse events according to discourse-specific situations (Howarth, 2000: 130). Almost all universally applicable theories have certain features when applied to particular examples, which make the cases distinct and hold the answers to complex questions of causation and consequences. To borrow from the hermeneutics, every communicative action implies interpretation making every research an act of reconstruction (Seale in Patton, 2015: 137). “To understand

human action we must not take the position of an outside observer who “sets” only the physical manifestations of the actor — from his or her own point of view — “means” in his or her actions... in focusing on actions, we can and must speak of its subjective meaning” (Yanow, 1996: 235). Having said that, further scrutiny of the meaning will lead scholarship to new avenues of interpretation. As social science is an activity of understanding of understanding itself, it is an understanding of the “second degree” (Soeffner in Patton, 2015: 137).

This interpretive method allows the researcher to offer *one of many* competing interpretations of a social environment and to open more space for deliberation (Wilkinson, 2011: 97). Perhaps it is extremely difficult to find a genuine causation in the social world, and such a method provides healthier analysis by unravelling a more candid reassessment of the events. This method aims to focus on the context and content of the enquiry, it negates the “given” in relation to the object of analysis (Wilkinson, 2011: 102). The proximate context is concerned with the “questions of who, what, when, where, to whom and with what effect”, whereas the distal context focuses on far broader, hence less attainable, details (Schegloff in Wilkinson, 2011: 98). Distal context is a significant part of the research in avoiding the duplication of normative interpretations of security and uncovering local perplexities and comprehensions of security and its architecture. The researcher has to differentiate between local knowledge and expert knowledge and make findings “experiential, context-specific and tacit” (Wilkinson, 2011: 99). Such knowledge allows the researcher to explore words and actions that are left behind the theoretical framework of securitization (Yanow in Wilkinson, 2011: 99). Having said that, it is worth noting that this method does not ask the researcher to choose

between either/or dichotomies, but to use local perspectives to facilitate the accommodation of multiple cultural formulations that will produce “a corpus of knowledge” as well as experience that contributes to expanding the overall comprehension of the issue (Wilkinson, 2011: 99).

A symbol holds several meanings that are mostly dependent on the context and meaning-maker, and that flexibility gives power to a symbol (Bernstein in Yanow, 1996: 6). Accordingly, their interpretation and allocation of meaning will help us to uncover the complex layers behind the South Caucasian turmoil. Such a method will focus on disjuncture and inconsistencies, and will show the context whereby ethnic difference took on the meaning of discontent. In these three conflicts, the ethnic narrative supported by historical references to national myths created the hostile environment. Priorities were assigned to symbols that securitised the political discourse over status and independence after the demise of the USSR.

By deconstructing the contexts of securitization, one could reveal the dynamics of local contributions to the challenges of transformation. Analysis of the proximate and distal contexts of securitization will uncover the ‘how’ questions of conflicts as well as show the experiences that created enmity. Territorial disputes became matters of urgency and security and were assigned priority over all other immediate problems that followed from the collapse of the USSR. The distal context reveals how the participants interpreted the events at the particular time, and not what analysts conclude (Yanow, 1996: 9). A proximate context, as mentioned, concerns the internal structure of who said what or how they acted during a securitization episode (Wilkinson, 2011: 106).

A discourse can be a text, or simply everything that the public 'reads', including TV and films, newspapers and other media, which makes it an intrinsic part of structuring behaviour (Wilkinson, 2011: 107). The texts and images that the public read on a large scale thus have the power to inform and affect public opinion. Hence the analysis of these events should not focus on the geopolitics of the issue, or chronological accounts, but rather *the narrative* that caused the events to unravel should be scrutinised.

In the case of the South Caucasus, there was a goal, an objective — independence — but was it a goal or an instrument of destruction or perhaps the direction selected toward independence implied destruction? The *telos* of nationalists was to make republics independent and to join the international community; however, it was excluded from the discourse that independence was more about cooperation rather than seclusion.

3.3. Summary

This study will look at the events through a discursive lens. In other words, observing words and speeches will unfold the plethora of underlying issues that predisposed communities to behave the way they did. Researching performatives will demonstrate how the escalation was architected by political actors. This thesis will foreground the relevant discourses and use the three conflicts as units of analysis to suggest that particular political agents determined the content of ethnic differences. The adjectives they employed defined the context in which this dissolution battle was fought.

Summing up this chapter, it is significant to point out that the theory of securitization offers a pluralistic approach to the problem and its interdisciplinary character will help to reassess the conflicts. Applying discourse analysis to the symbolic power which was generated by securitizing moves explains the perplexities that were hidden behind the veil of nationalism and historic justice in the South Caucasus. By studying the discourses of securitization, one can be better equipped to understand the reasons for wars in the region. The methods applied analyse the metrics and statistics that were used to trigger the conflicts. As already explained, this chapter outlined the theory of securitization, discourse analysis and the method that will be used to test indicators.

4. Chapter Four

Nationalism and its Perils

“Gave us the world to possess with all its unlimited varieties”
Shota Rustaveli (twelfth century Georgian poet¹⁸)

Introduction

¹⁸ Rustaveli, S. *The Man in the Panther's Skin*. <http://sacred-texts.com/asia/mps/mps03.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July, 2018]

This chapter adds an explanatory power to the empirical part, one that focuses on the discourses of history and nationalism. One must look into how the ethno-nationalism intoxicated the political and social environment and helped to create a rather different version of history and its reading. It outlines the approach to ethno-nationalism and its effects on *Perestroika* and the South Caucasian turmoil. It addresses the hierarchical system and the role of ethno-nationalism in preserving that order. Additionally, in order to make the point more explicit, this section will allot attention to understanding of history in the Soviet Union. As one can observe, historical narratives and ancient territories engulfed the former republics. The misuse and abuse of many historical facts and myths helped to define the ethnic paradigm of the armed clashes. When addressing conflicts in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia, one must bear in mind the complicated structure of historical narrative propagated by Soviet scholarship, and, later on, its reflection in the discourse of nationalist leaders. Therefore, for a better understanding of this paradigm, one must look into the structure and organization of the USSR itself.

The guiding principle of this section is to show the pretexts behind the selection and interpretation of history that were used as mobilizing tools in the conflicts under discussion (Geller and Nekrich, 1986). Most audiences in the Soviet Union were broadly more familiar with ‘what’ (the timeline of the events) side of history, rather than ‘why’ (a critical assessment). In other words, interpretive questions are fundamental before establishing conclusions about the past. When discussing the conflicting parties of the South Caucasus it is vital to understand why and how the confluence of certain factors and actors led to wars over status and territories.

History changed the meaning and status of a republic or its autonomous unit in the USSR. For this research, it is necessary to explain the role of a modified history and how it affected the union republics and paved the way toward its weaponisation. This section aims to explain the context of political manipulations and argues that interpretation of the patterns behind them is essential for building a sustainable future that will embrace social inclusiveness and reject political particularism.

It is significant to recall that, in the USSR, history was part of the propaganda of nation-building. Therefore, one must acknowledge how nationalism was glorified, and the way in which the past (which had mostly been forged to fit the political agenda) was used as a shield, aimed at protecting and safeguarding the Soviet regime, which became a tool of segregation. As the USSR authorities used ethnic differences to build and sustain the state, its local instantiation was erecting walls. Ultimately, for the conflicting parties, the acknowledgement of this historical blunder can lead to the realignment of previously held beliefs. In many respects, the republican intellectual elites had voiced dissent against the Soviet policies that had a selective approach to nationalism. This trend had bred the idealization of the part of the history which was suppressed or prohibited. It might be argued that Soviet mythmaking caused a resonance on the other side of the barricade. As a result, the past and its selective interpretation were constitutive elements in the discourse of the 1980s South Caucasus and defined the lines of divisions among communities. This thesis argues for a reassessment of these constitutive discourses, as well as the facts that were deployed by the various parties at the time.

This chapter will outline the principles that forged the Communist ideas which shaped the Soviet Union. It will examine the system that nurtured the ideology of

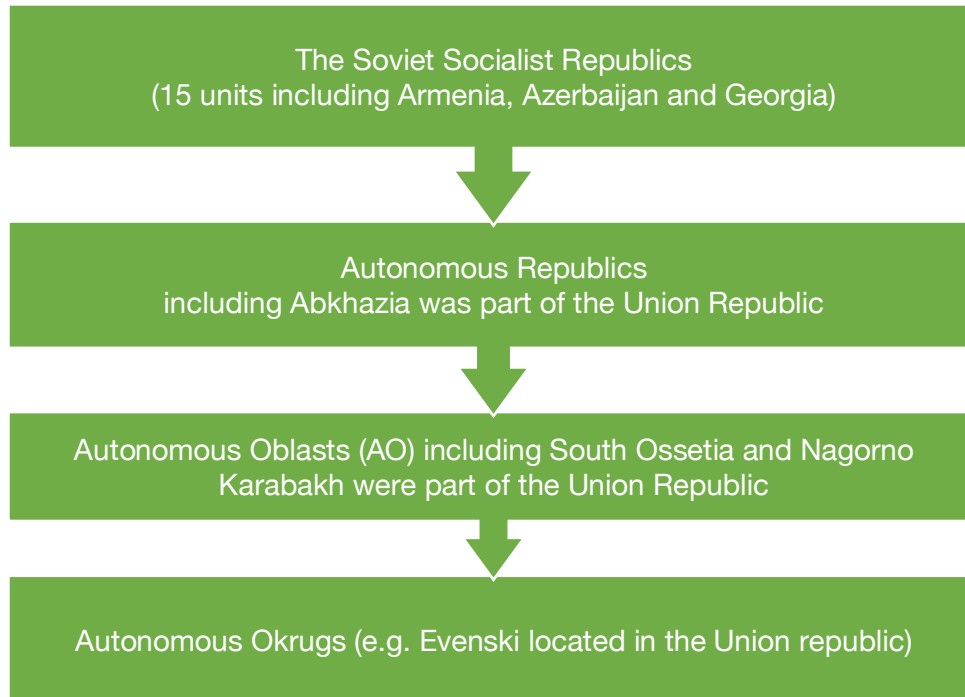
the Soviets and was then later engulfed by internecine struggles. By providing this outline of the Soviet system, one might reveal the predicaments that contributed to the discourse and which caused a deterioration in interethnic relations.

4.1. Hierarchy

As already mentioned elsewhere, the USSR was a strictly hierarchical order, the fact that influenced its units in the aftermath of the collapse. The USSR was created in 1922 and became a federation in 1924 (Francis, 2011: 64). The Constitution of the USSR from 1977 onwards indicated that it was “an integral, federal, multinational state formed in accordance with the principle of socialist federalism as a result of the free self-determination of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet Socialist Republics” (Art. 70) (Francis, 2011: 64). The USSR was based on territoriality and ethnically defined entities. That is, the territory and ethnical affiliations were a source of either advantage or a disadvantage. At large it was Joseph Stalin who decided which nations were superior and which inferior. Hence, the classification of ethnical groups had designed a cluster of privileged nations — Union Republics, followed by the Autonomous Republics, Autonomous districts or areas (or Oblasts).

There were union republics that were eligible to secede according to the Constitution, and enjoyed some privileges; then the next tier consisted of the autonomous republics that were formally entitled to a certain degree of autonomy but were essentially subjects of the republican government (see the chart below). The third tier represented a type of limited autonomy, and the fourth, the “oblast”, was a nominal unit. In the current study, there are three tiers involved: Georgia,

Armenia and Azerbaijan were the union republics, Abkhazia was an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the Georgian SSR, whereas Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia had the rank of an autonomous oblast (Chapters 10 and 11, 1977).



The members of the USSR were not considered equal; in fact, only fifty-three out of more than one hundred nationalities got a particular territory, some of them alongside the status of a “titular nation”. Titular entities possessed administrative powers due to economic, demographic, cultural, or political reasons (Bremmer, 1993: 13). Fifteen out of the fifty-three were union republics, and others were either autonomous republics, autonomous regions (oblast) or autonomous areas (oblast) (Bremmer and Taras, 1997: 8). In sum, the Soviet policies toward nationalities were defined as a combination of “the satisfaction of the interests of all nations with their drawing together and mutual assistance” that was utterly incompatible with nationalism and chauvinism (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 300). The rights and

duties of the entities were enshrined in the Soviet Constitution, though only fifteen republics were allowed to secede. Such inequalities have influenced the methods and tools used by local elites in competition for power. They helped to produce and re-produce the differences and build up securitization discourse. It was a fruitful condition for *othering* those who did not share certain ideas.

4.2. Ethno-nationalism: instrument of the order

The ethnonationalistic structure of the state created a parallel ethnic hierarchy, separate from the political order. The fifteen republics were considered to be titular nations with a higher status in the hierarchy. This assumption was based on the ideas of prominent Soviet scholar Yulian Bromley who defined ethnos as a “historically stable entity of people developed on a certain territory and possessing common, relatively stable features of culture (language) and psyche as well as a consciousness of their unity and of their difference from other similar entities fixed in a self-name” (in Tishkov, 1997: 3). The ideologists of ethnic management were convinced that ethnos were ancient, self-contained bodies making a journey through history, and provided a special taxonomy of ethnos, emphasizing “ethnikos” or “ethnos” in its narrow sense (Tishkov, 1997: 3). Bromley’s vision was incorporated into the political distribution of ethnic territories, as the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Science served as a research think tank for the government (Tishkov, 1992: 371-373). Bromley was the head of the key institute that directed the research of ethnic groups and provided the policymakers with policy papers. Bruno Coppieters highlights that research was heavily politicized and based on an ethnocentric attitude, which resulted in a production of “definitive answers” for

complicated scientific issues, often without there being any firm evidence (2002: 105). The main ethnoses were permitted to have union republics, i.e., the “nation was not an ethnic group with a titular statehood — it is exclusively that part of the group which resides on its own national territory” (Tishkov, 1997: 3). As Yuri Slezkine observes, the USSR represented a socialist content but lacked a “national form” (1994: 435, see also Brubaker, 2003).

Bromley’s works, along with the work of his colleagues, created a new type of ethnic concept based on the definition offered by Stalin. It was Stalin’s idea to include “psychological make-up” as a criterion for ethnic belonging (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 426). When Stalin proposed the framework as an interpretation of ethnicity, the academic debate was limited exclusively to that particular denotation. Hence, it became impossible to engage with alternative views or propose a distinct theory. His definition stipulated that a nation was: “an historically formed and stable community of people which has emerged on the basis of common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up, the latter being manifest in a common shared culture” (in Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 426, see also Slezkine, 1994). In other words, Stalin had decided to re-invent the Russian Empire along nationalistic lines. This was a shift from a Marxist view toward the “deep primordial roots” of nations (Martin, 2001: 443). One must note, that the Soviet Union amalgamated all the above-mentioned characteristics and created a system where ethno-nationalism was institutionalised through ethno-territorial federalism, where citizens were classified according to their biological nationalities as some of them had a “preferential” treatment because they belonged to a certain ethnic group (Slezkine, 1994: 415). Accordingly, all scholars followed the guideline and launched a

competition to align their views with those of their leader. Nationalism had become bound to ethnography, and politics, and ultimately became a matter of life and death, as Stalin never tolerated dissenting voices. It was necessary to preserve the ethno-territorial entities in order to hold the state together (Slezkine, 1994: 438). After Stalin's death, there was a wider debate during the 1960s about the concept of ethnicity; however, the majority of scholars drew the conclusion that there was no nation without a "self-name" and "self-identity" (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 426). Despite some voices calling on the official academic line to consider objective factors in defining the ethnicity, in Soviet academia self-identity was a self-evident aspect of ethnicity (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 427). Purporting such assumptions helped the Soviet leadership to claim that they had resolved the major question that capitalists were unable to fathom, i.e. relations between nations (Lapidus, 1984: 556). One can argue that the issue of ethnicity was one of those topics that the Soviet ideologists fought to depict differently from the Western world. Russian leaders, and Bolsheviks in particular, strove to promote their distinctiveness, which for them meant superiority over the culture of European Enlightenment.

Soviet academia accepted the view that ethnic self-identity was the major denominator of ethnic entities (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 426). Viktor Kozlov formed a more extended concept and included "psychic make-up" (emotional) in the wording:

"An ethnic community is a social organism which has formed, over certain territory, out of a group of people with similarities of language, common traits of culture and everyday life, some common social values and traditions and a considerable blending of different social components achieved in the course of the development of

economic and social cultural relations. The basic features of an ethnic community are ethnic self- identity and self-name, language, territory, specific features of psychic make-up, culture and every-day life as well as some specific forms of socio-territorial organisations or a drive to create one” (in Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 427).

Later on, Bromley proposed differentiating between those ethnicities who shared common territory, and those who did not (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 428). His theory created a terminological distinction between the *ethno-social organisms* and “ethnocoses”, which in turn were defined “as historically formed aggregates of people” who shared culture and psychological traits (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 428). Bromley has incorporated the psychological element into the broader *theory* of ethnic nationalism. These ‘scientific’ myths about ethnicity have had concrete consequences. As Soviet academia was isolated from the rest of the world and lacked opportunities for the exchange of ideas, most scholars believed in the theory (or else they had no choice). As Valery Tishkov observes, it was “self-satisfaction and intellectual isolationism” that caused the crisis in the field (1992: 372). Consequently, nationalism became the keynote aspect of the Communist ideology that aimed to suppress and diminish the individual. It may be, then, that Stalin’s version of nationalism was a very particular weapon for establishing the order that made the Soviet Union a superpower. Such an interpretation of the concept of nationalism was responsible for its negative accommodation in the 1980s.

Tishkov points out that even in the post-Soviet period, scholarship was unable to get away from the primordial vision deeply embedded in studies of nationalism and history (1997: 4). When a new edition of the ethnology textbook was published it still included the formulation that “ethnoses emerge through human evolution,

being one of the forms of the group integration... With full assurance that it is possible to tell that ethnoses have existed since the upper-paleolithic times when *Homo sapiens erectus* appeared” (Tishkov, 1997: 4).

To demonstrate the crisis in identity and ethnicity studies, Tishkov offers an extract from a textbook that harshly denies any intellectual or social constructivist scholarship indicating that Russian social science viewed ethnic communities as existing realities, as objects produced by “historical law” that will remain the founding principle of the domestic ethnology (in 1997: 4). Such an example illuminates the sources of the ethnic interpretation of differences as well as the indoctrination of history, nationalism and social science overall. Tishkov confirms that scholars heavily rely on a long-shared methodology and fiercely reject any change (1997: 5). Social sciences in the USSR were allocated an apologetic position and they supported the dissemination of some of the mysterious and powerful mythologies that upheld the order (Kemp-Welch, 1980: 124). The scientific elite had to cooperate with the requirements of the Communist regime in analysing the impact of industrialisation — in other words, hide unpleasant truths concerning the economy and collectivisation, and create myths about the USSR (Kemp-Welch, 1980: 124-125).

This flawed theory and methodology was reused and abused in the post-Soviet space (Tishkov, 1997: 7), with the South Caucasus being a good example. Primordialism acquired the potential to shape the discourse of new identities and national politics (Tishkov, 1997: 7). Distorted and backward views about nationalism and ethnicity combined with historic narratives became an efficient vernacular for the mobilization as well as marginalization of the newly independent societies. The

term “ethnos” gained traction, and was a central point in intellectual and political debates of the 1980s and early 1990s (Tishkov, 1997: 7).¹⁹ Fallacies stipulated in the ethnos theory that was propagated in the USSR served as conflict-generators and instruments for political entrepreneurs (Tishkov, 1997: 7). Virtually all leaders started to refer to the categories and paradigms of that theory in their language (Tishkov, 1997: 7). Tishkov offers an illuminating example of an explanation of ideological mobilization, written by a nationalist leader from Tatarstan: “Ethnos is a biosocial phenomenon, combining nature and society. Ethnos carries in itself a biological energy and is subject to other laws than those for social processes” (1997: 7).

One further variable — the dominance of one party — could explain the failure of the Soviet Union. Marx had never thought about the one-party system, as he expected that the proletariat could rule without an “intermediary organization” (Sakwa, 1998: 280). Marxism, a western philosophy, was reabsorbed into a national setting and fairly quickly took a national colour (Carr, 1956: 386). Karl Marx’s doctrine required Russia to develop on capitalist lines, and only after the Western path of industrialisation was fulfilled could Russia move on to its Marxist destiny (Carr, 1956: 386). Peter Struve, a founder of legal Marxism, advocated recognition of “our uncultured condition” and need to “go to school to the capitalists” (in Carr, 1956: 386). Yet, it did not materialize, as the Soviet system nurtured its own style of Marxism excluding capitalism from the development cycle.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that ethnic belonging and nationalism still influence the former Communist states, especially Russia and its foreign policy preferences. The Soviet imprint of false scholarship has not been removed.

Being dependent on the one party made it an ideological establishment, which provided a programme that was a substitution of the Constitution itself (Hill and Frank, 1981: 106). Party was intertwined with the “organs of state power” and “administration” who were unable to reject the official line upheld by the Communist Party (Hill and Frank, 1981: 107). Another aspect that contradicted the Marxist ideas was the cult of personality, which was hindering the idea of socialism (Scanlan, 1992: 20). Roy Medvedev argues that Stalinism was equal to the concept that depicted the socialist system as one that does not respect the law (in Scanlan, 1992: 20). A monolithic structure had sustained a politically repressive and economically inefficient regime, after which the Soviet Union was facing the existential crisis by 1990 (Brown, 1996: 90-91). According to Sigmund Neumann, the very definition of the party implies a “democratic climate”, which makes it deceptive in a dictatorship, as “a one-party system is a contradiction in itself. Only the coexistence of at least one other competitive group makes a political party real” (in Hill and Frank, 1981: 139). Lacking pluralism and dissenting voices, the Communist Party became entrapped into its fading ideology. Constant reference to the ideals of Marxism-Leninism bred a culture of unquestionable loyalty. Even during the Perestroika years the officials upheld Leninist ideas, arguing that it was time to go “not back to Lenin, but forward to Lenin” (Brown, 1996: 120). Despite the failures that the Bolshevik ideology had spawned for decades, the Party was still referring to it in search of a “distant, beautiful and rosy future” (White, 2001: 4). Even reform was seen through the prism of the past, hence political discourse largely took a nostalgic tone. Perhaps this oxymoron, of the past and the future, was one of the reasons for the failure of the reform.

4.2.1. Other shortcomings

Asides from ethno-nationalism, there were other systemic challenges that plagued the USSR. The Constitutional order of the Soviet Union was more about individual personalities than institutions, and it was usually determined by the status of the man who presided over the institution rather than the other way around (Sakwa, 1998: 107). Sakwa argues that constitutionalism and legalism are alien to the Russian political tradition (1998: 107). This is the reason why the four constitutions of the USSR were programme-like documents that did not reveal any details about the operations of the political system in the state (Sakwa, 1998: 107). Brezhnev's version of the document, despite containing ambitious plans, did not differ fundamentally from the previous three (Sakwa, 1998: 109). Notably, the constitution was often upstaged by the ideas of the Communist Party, which strove toward an "ultimate goal" of Communism they viewed as "a highly organized society of free, socially conscious working people" where the ability of each person will be employed for the good of a society (White, 2001: 3). On the way towards their bright future, the Constitution stated that the Communist Party was the nucleus of the political system (1977).

Terence Rigby argues that the Soviet Constitution was a "notoriously misleading and incomplete" document about the distribution of power within the system (1980: 12). Reflecting this extremely centralized power structure, it was almost impossible to find a concrete line separating the powers of the Party bodies and the government (Rigby, 1980: 12). This aspect demonstrated that the Soviet system did not operate based on law but on discretion (Rigby, 1980: 12). Because

the Soviet system was never prepared to adhere even to the laws and rules set by the system itself (Schapiro in Rigby, 1980: 12) it was therefore impossible to carry out its reform in a succinct way.

A citizen of the USSR was obliged to protect the Soviet Union and its interests, as well as to help “strengthen its might and prestige” (1977). This same document also acknowledged the right of the republics to secede freely from the USSR, but Soviet Constitution was an item of decoration that existed because a state had to have a constitution. It stipulated and combined the ideology of Soviet socialism and communism, which was largely delusional. The USSR never achieved the ultimate goal of “building the Communism” that had been promised by its founders and consequent leaders.

Indeed, Russians ruled the Soviet Union but ethnic elites governed their own regions (Sakwa, 1998: 251). One of the setbacks created by the nationalities policies was the nationality line in the job application or university admission form that gave certain groups advantages or disadvantages (Martin, 2001: 449). When the state was officially telling its people that their nationality was the most important attribute of their identity, it of course reinforced a sense of ethnic belonging in its members (Martin, 2001: 449), when the political entrepreneurs launched their campaigns. Accordingly, their discourse had a profound influence on the development of local ideas and perceptions about the future political direction. Geoffrey Hosking emphasizes the influence of the local Communist leaders who shaped their respective Soviet republics (Hosking, 1985). Republican administrations had a better knowledge of local attitudes, and they interacted with dissenting voices that threatened to shake the USSR for decades. Hence ignorance of the importance of

these leaders leaves a chasmic gap in the studies of the former units of the Soviet Union. Local elites governed on the behalf of the central authorities, but the central institutions were interpreted to enforce the matters in the local way (Sakwa, 1998: 253). Put another way, the elites translated their own rules, serving their own interests. Simultaneously, the USSR lacked the “positive content” to be “a dynamic pole of attraction” (Sakwa, 1998: 253). Perhaps that lack of positive content backfired and failed the government in the years of *Perestroika*, which Gorbachev partially admits (Gorbachev, 1995: 329 and 336). The aggressive narrative that was embedded in the foundations of the USSR could not attract the populace.

It is possible that the nationalists who launched independence campaigns and appealed to Gorbachev to fulfil the Constitution were hoping to test the limits of the Soviet Constitution (see Gamsakhurdia’s letter to Gorbachev). Yet the Constitution was a frozen document, separate from the polity without providing any viable guarantees of rights and freedoms. It stipulated norms that the state was unable to accomplish. Archie Brown argues that Gorbachev wished to make that constitution viable, and in fact his aim was the *liberalisation* of the USSR rather than a reform (1996). Gorbachev himself thought that there were fundamental differences between the federations proposed by Lenin and later by Stalin, he argues that Lenin had offered a project where the nation-states could have wider participation and retain a greater degree of independence; but Stalin adopted a different approach and “interpreted” Lenin’s principles in his own way — by empowering the centre and stripping union republics of real powers (1995: 329).

4.3. Branding history

History was a very special science in the USSR. Understood as a “totality” and a “unified process”, it was one of the pillars that shaped the “historical and dialectical processes” at the time (Kedourie, 1984: 137). It was propaganda and a didactic tool at the same time, combining powerful ideological functions. Soviet historiography at the first stage served revolutionary principles and then shifted to maintain and strengthen the political stability of the regime (Heer, 1971: 13). Pressure was imposed on historians to provide upright historical examples to demonstrate the revolutionary spirit of forbears (Heer, 1971: 14). This could explain the rule when every single book or public speech had to start with the name and a quote of a predecessor — usually Lenin.

As Heer remarks, Marx took the Hegelian god of history to preside over a dialectic of modes of production because he wanted to change the world rather than to explain it (Heer, 1971: 1-3). Marx allocated a function to the historical context and timing of its application (in Heer, 1971: 4). He proclaimed that “Men make their own history, but ... they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past” (in Heer, 1971: 4). Lenin carefully reinterpreted Marxian views, accommodating his interests and perceptions of the future state of the proletariat. This, as Elie Kedourie observes, was an “illusion and misapprehension” (Kedourie, 1984: 138).

Lenin was convinced that knowledge of only history was insufficient, and he suggested applying a critical attitude and independent tests to historiography. His vision of history was instrumental and didactic at the same time, using history as the vehicle for the party to move history forward (Heer, 1971: 6). Lenin thought that

Marxism must differentiate between developing and developed capitalism, and, in developing capitalist states like Russia, it was important to overthrow the “absolutist regime” and “draw all classes of the population into politics” (Hirsch, 2005: 28-29). Those who control the past have power over the institutional memory of people, hence the Bolsheviks had worked out special techniques to “manipulate the past, control history” at an unprecedented scale (Geller and Nekrich, 1986: 8). Fundamental teachings based on Marx, Lenin and Stalin amended and corrected the history of Russia, the union republics and even the USSR itself (Geller and Nekrich, 1986: 8).

The leader of the Russian Revolution went beyond the scientific interpretation of history and rewrote the theory of history in an active voice (Heer, 1971: 10), giving inception to the new ideology that used history for political purposes. One might argue that history is often used for political legitimization; however, the scale of the abuse in the Soviet Union was unprecedented. It was an imperative tool, glue to bind together millions of people, yet it was mostly illusory. For millions of Soviet citizens, it was unthinkable to realise that the world they inhabited was partially fake. In other words, re-fashioned history, that served the interests of the Bolshevik *putsch* and their subsequent elite, was neither precise nor a dogma. A special status was assigned to history as it served as an instrument in creating a pro-Communist society. It is worth noting that Marx himself was not sure that Communist ideas could be implemented in Russia, as he thought Russian society was unable to stay true to his project (Heer, 1971). History became a medium that was aimed at filling that gap within the Russian society.

After Lenin's interpretations of Marx were deemed out-dated, Khrushchev launched another re-evaluation of historiography when history officially became a political science linked to political life, because it helped society to define the tasks through the examples of the past (Heer, 1971). To be more specific, Soviet ideology perceived history as a scientific tool and historians were the "Party's worthy helpmeets in the communist education of the working people" (Heer, 1971: 15). As one can notice, a continued re-imagination of history did not help the ideas of the Perestroika. The nucleus of a society was swayed to believe in a narrative that served to empower the pontifical regime of truth.

The USSR was to be the country where class and national antagonism was absent, and the didactic function of history was guided toward formation of the highest, most positive, spirit of man (Heer, 1971: 16). The party hierarchy manipulated history for the sake of Communist ideals, but the incorporation of only 'correct' myths did not help the dysfunctional regime in its quest for survival. Heer argues that historical writings are clues to dominant political hierarchy, and a historical treatment of any political figure is a weapon in the hands of a ruling party or individual (Heer, 1971: 30). Slezkine observes how, in 1934, the Congress of Soviet Writers celebrated an international stature that the culture of all Soviet peoples possessed, with their own classics, founding fathers and folkloric riches (1994: 446). History was involved in an attempt to sustain the regime, but as with most absolutist systems which tend to represent all the events of history as depending upon the great first causes linked by the chain of fatality, they in fact assisted the further suppression of men and their role in history altogether (Tocqueville in Arendt, 1986: 345).

Historians in the USSR were subjected to multiple regulations and the administrative decisions of the State Committee for the Coordination of the Scientific Research; alongside this regulation, history teaching was under the tight supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (Heer, 1971: 35). Which means that it was an instrument of political mobilisation assisting the government to run the hierarchy. However, despite such profound restrictions and tight regulations the USSR could not avert the catastrophe. Apparently, the dilemma was in the ability of communication and adjustability, as mentioned in the introduction, Huntington argues that the power has to be “dispersed” and shared. The level of restraint embedded in the system made it impossible to disperse power. To be more precise, the absolute control of historiography and historic thought entrapped the discourse on history and nationalism as well as independence into an echo-chamber, making communication and open deliberation almost impossible.

There was another significant role allocated to history that represented Russia as a saviour of small nations including Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians. For state-building in the USSR it was essential to convince the communities that their life before Russian suzerainty was economically impoverished and politically dysfunctional. The majority of studies emphasized the great contribution made by the Russian Empire to “save” the small nations from Persian or Ottoman occupation (in Altstadt, 1992: 41). Aron Milman attempts to argue the point from the first sentence of his introduction, which quotes the newspaper *Bakinskii Rabochii*: it stipulates that Azerbaijan’s merger with Russia had an “immense” influence on the Azerbaijani people and helped them to get rid of “alien” conquerors, as well as bring to an end internecine clashes and feudal isolation, and finally become attached to

Russian culture (Milman, 1966: 26).²⁰ In other words, even for the Soviet leadership it was instrumental to be respected by smaller nations and to depict Russia as a principal state to be appreciated for the survival of tiny kingdoms in the dominantly Islamic neighbourhood. Communists had a selective approach to the Tsarist legacy. Partially they condemned the bourgeoisie and class society, yet they wished to retain the influence that the Romanov Empire had accumulated over the course of three centuries. Policies toward the South Caucasus followed that template. The Tsar was bad, so the discourse ran, yet the colonization by Russians was positive. This was the broad message stipulated in the history of the three states.

4.4. Crafting history

Historical variables are a useful tool for tracing the trajectory of developments (Habermas, 1987: 248). In the case of the South Caucasus historiography has forgotten or ignored the fact that the “validity of counterdiscourses count no more and no less than those of the discourses in power” and that they represent “nothing else than the effects of power they unleash” (Habermas, 1987: 281). The stories and narratives of political agents have not considered that counter-discourse, which deserves examination.

The quotation at the start of this chapter is the opening verse of the twelfth century Georgian poem *‘Knight in the Panther’s Skin’* and celebrates the power of the diverse and colourful world. A twelfth century poet glorifies the many colours of the universe. The poem celebrates diversity and multiplicity of the world. That

²⁰ Translation my own

multifaceted story of the past raises the question: why and how did the process of alienation and isolation prevail across the area in one particular time-frame?²¹ How and why did the people and their leaders re-design the past in its worst context and choose war over peace? It is important to re-evaluate the events that have been categorised as the roots of the turmoil in the 1980s and were then used to support the primordial argument of the wars. At the same time, cultures are neither givens, nor “natural” conditions, but are constructed “through collective action and reinforced through the manipulation of collective consciousness” (Renan in Laitin, 2007: 30). This is the reason for citing this old text: if the diversity was expressed openly in poetry and culture then there must have been other reasons for structuring and modifying differences. This verse demonstrates the values of medieval societies better than any other historical or chronological document. The poetry reflects the texture and perception of a society of one era. Consequently, it can serve as a focal point for assumptions about the past, revealing more truthful dynamics of social and political attitudes of people in the given area. This is because a historicised text by a chronicler or historian is inclined to demonstrate loyalty to a ruling regime rather than offer a holistic picture of the time.

When addressing history, one must always keep in mind that the story of the past is “a narrative construction” which is communicated through “the epistemic and ontological decisions of historians” (Munslow, 2012: 3). Alun Munslow argues that a historian’s ethical choices, as well as their ideological inclinations, have a fundamental effect on their act of historical narration, which makes history a fictive act (2012: 9). The very origins of historical facts and the methods and approaches

²¹ This thesis focuses on the 1980s and 1990s

used by historians to evaluate the past are questionable. In the Cambridge Modern History, knowledge of the past is considered to be a fluid distilled through one or more minds and thus cannot be impersonal and unalterable, hence there is no “objective” historical truth (Carr, 1962: 2). For E.H. Carr, history is a personal position in time, which forms an answer for a vision of the society in a given period (1962: 2). History is a corpus of discovered facts. However, these facts are derived from scripts or documents written by certain people, who have had their own visions and perceptions. The notion that facts speak for themselves is untrue as well. Facts speak indeed, but somebody makes the choice between them and depicts those which are relevant for him or for her (Carr, 1962: 5). Historians are selective and opinionated, thus historical facts are the product of interpretation, making belief in facts as a single truth a simple fallacy (Carr, 1962: 6). Carr elaborates on an example drawn from Greek history,,: despite much factual information, all those writings are the views of Athenian citizens; moreover, the Medieval history of Europe is a vision of religious chroniclers that emphasizes the clerical view of the world at the time (1962: 7-8). Accordingly, Geoffrey Barraclough’s argument that the history we read is not factual, rather “a series of accepted judgements” seems accurate (in Carr, 1962: 8). All documents are interpretations of the thoughts of their authors. American historian Carl Becker went even further and declared that historical facts are the creations of authors and had not existed before these acts of creation (Carr, 1962: 15). In addition to Carr’s scepticism, Jurgen Habermas defines “the space of history” as filled with “contingent occurrences” of “disordered” formations of discourses that come up and go away with time (1987: 253). In Soviet historiography, this fluidity or flux of time was completely ignored. This trend of ignorance transforms history into a force or an ‘event’ in the Habermasian understanding, when

“the reversal of relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary... the entry of a masked other” is an event itself (Habermas, 1987: 253). It was Hegel’s vision of history which was mainly founded on human needs, drives, inclinations and passions that in turn “gave currency” to laws and principles (Hegel, 2011: 91). He argues that world history begins with a single purpose aimed to satisfy “some sort of conscious purpose” (Hegel, 2011: 93), which means that it is determined and shaped by clashes, volitions, interests and activities that constitute “instruments” toward the purpose (Hegel, 2011: 93).

Karl Popper suggests that such an approach is not quite accurate, as it risks denying that society develops (2002: 6). Understanding that social uniformities are not “laws of nature”, but are rather man-made, empowers human beings to alter and even control them (Popper, 2002: 6). To understand a social event, Popper proposes three options in the doctrine of intuitive understanding, arguing that (a) a social event should be explained in terms of the forces that brought it; (b) to understand the meaning of a social event, teleological causations are not enough — rather it must explain the “meaning and significance” of its occurrence, which changes the “situational values” of a wide range of events; (c) one must understand the meaning, underlying historical trends and tendencies existing during the period in question and then analyse the contribution the event has made to the process by which such trends are manifested (Popper, 2002: 18-20).

For Carr, the key function of the historian is “neither to love the past nor to emancipate ... from the past” rather to master and understand it, so that it transforms into the key of unfolding the present (1962: 20). History is mostly an interaction between a historian and *his* facts, a kind of perpetual dialogue of the

present and the past (Carr, 1962: 24). Carr explains history as a social process, one that is constructed by meanings given to the investigated facts by historians (Carr, 1962: 49). It is very important to remember that "every society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth", in other words, that there is always a different discourse which a society or a group accepts and casts in the role of truth (Foucault in Habermas, 1987: 270).

Thucydides provides a detailed account of the Peloponnesian War. It was both a political and a military report, and Thucydides considered the role of a historian in finding and describing truth (Donnelly and Norton, 2011: 21). Yet, what is considered to be the truth? Any type of writing is the reflection of an author: his or her perception of the events considered. Thus, discovering truth in accounts dating back hundreds or thousands of years becomes a dangerous undertaking.

Broadly speaking, a fixed and dogmatic approach to the past among the academics in the USSR has developed and strengthened a category of *truth* that had functioned as true. This very truth was used to legitimise the wars and hostilities in the 1980s and early 1990s. The reclusive character of Soviet academia, and particularly of social scientists, excluded the possibility of contesting the meaning and content of history or ethnography (Tishkov, 1992). It was acknowledged as an un-doubted truth rarely scrutinised or questioned. Postmodern ideas of historiography were not accepted among scholars.

The nationalist version of history is a way of bringing together past, present and future, but history in that case is the "chief" collector and method of gathering the time (Breuilly, 2009: 7). History became a force for achieving goals through individuals rather than being just a record of deed and events (Breuilly, 2009: 9). The

past of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was largely selected and engineered during the formative years of the Bolshevik regime. History was remodelled, re-evaluated and re-written in a way that was comfortable for a typical totalitarian state that sought total control over its people. History was a tool to keep the huge landmass together and was firmly incorporated in the system of Soviet governance. The instrumentalist approach to history became a fruitful basis for a national appropriation of the past, historicising everything from language and literature, to law and institutions (Breuilly, 2009: 10). An uncontested or unquestioned attitude to the past idealised it, and became a convenient instrument to nationalist leaders in the aftermath of the USSR. The 'patriots' (this word epitomized freedom) reused and abused that Soviet instrument successfully (see chapters 5 and 6).

When addressing the intellectual foundations of nationalist history, John Breuilly notes several elements that caused shifts in history: a civilisation (European Christendom), a state (France or Britain), a social group (bourgeoisie) or a "world-historical" individual (Napoleon) (2009: 9). Breuilly insists that intellectuals who supported such a view of history found a certain attractiveness in the achievements of the past (2009: 10). In some ways they supported the creation of "natural symbols" that exclude "demographic minorities" which become "symbolic pollutants" (Herzfield, 1997: 68). Nationalists saw the past to be an attractive tool for the mobilization of the public. At the same time, many intellectuals lent their voices to nationalists by possessing "authoritative control" over the concept and interpretation of culture (Herzfield, 1997: 68). In the 1980s, public intellectuals promoted heroic history by commemorating the past in a sacred way. A good example of such development took place in 1987, in the canonization of Ilia

Chavchavadze, a nineteenth-century Georgian poet and a public figure (Forsyth, 2013: 585). He became a symbol of the new Georgia, nationalist in its depth and democratic in its context. This was despite the fact that Chavchavadze had never hailed the Church, but had instead often criticized it. It was in vogue to quote him, often out of context, which in turn created a false myth about his ideas.²²

4.5. Why did history matter?

This thesis does not refer to essentialist evaluation, where history is considered as an important causation. Rather, interpretation of its meaning and validity is what transformed the study of the past into a dangerous peril for the generations to come. History acquired a value that was worshipped by certain actors. Later, during the collapse of the USSR, history became the dominant subject of nationalistic and independence discourse.

Jurgen Habermas calls history a process of crisis-ridden experiences, where the present is a “sudden critical branching” and the future is represented as the “pressure of unresolved problems”, hence the trend shapes “an existentially sharpened consciousness of the danger of *missed decisions* and *neglected interventions*” (Habermas, 1987: 58). The Soviet authorities had created a specific interrelation of myths about the history of the units and their relations. The myths were dogmatised thanks to the universal ‘filter’ that was utilised to crystallise alien thought and science in the most useful way. This ‘filter’ was created over the course of many years, and served as a medium for Soviet elites to govern the vast landmass

²² Author: his quotes were very popular; everyone at school, on television shows or at a meeting repeatedly used his word, often without any comprehension of his ideas.

they claimed to be a destiny of the Russian people. Therefore, this ideological filter, which amounted to an epistemic violence, did influence the demise of the USSR and the ideas that dominated the “dissident” movements. This epistemic filter degraded the rational interpretation of political issues, the unity of the proletariat was achieved and initiated in the interest of dominant groups and supported by “popular emotions and hysteria” (Niebuhr, 1960: 88).

The actual use of history in nation-building strategies was more important than a structural change in the order. The USSR did collapse from the centre, but the mobilisation of communities against each other was local. There are many facts and documents that prove the involvement of the Soviet/Russian security agencies in the turmoil (Sigua, Chervonnaya), though the major actors were local nationalists and freedom fighters. The nationalists used the Bolshevik-style oppression widely to support their causes. Yet they defined it as anti-Bolshevism and love of the fatherland. This pattern has resulted in something worse: hyper-nationalism. In fact, there were fewer idols but there was a new truth — this was ethnic affiliation.

Nationalism provides a general outline and language for the majority of political discussions (Harris in Billig, 1995: 99) in the context of this study. Political actors seek grand items for their political agenda as they produce a sublime vision of the nation. Consequently, nationalism is a “condition for conventional strategies” rather than a political strategy itself (Billig, 1995). It might be argued that the fabric of multicultural society as well as the historical context was the appropriate condition for the application of nationalistic strategies. It is noteworthy that narratives and history were used for securitization and mobilisation around the leader or a flag. The fact that nobody calculated any possible setbacks and negative consequences from

the decisions is striking. The stories offered were never questioned by the broad audience, besides, thousands of people took part in the marches and demonstrations to add legitimacy to those political entrepreneurs of the time. Addressing national identity, Billig argues that it is embodied in habits that constitute social life, including thinking and use of language (1995: 8). The process of talking about nationhood is equal to the possession of national identity (Billig, 1995: 8). Soviet historiography was a source of “useful” language for addressing and securitising national identity in suppressed communities.

Donnelly and Norton suggest that almost all cultures write themselves through historical heritage, and that the historic genre is a mirror that helps a group to envision and reify an identity (2011: 192). Practicing history in this way gives it an ontological function: mnemonic practices constitute a fundamental part of what it means to be human, they are activities that all human societies engage in as a part of “self-definition and the articulation of identity” (Donnelly and Norton, 2011: 192).

It is fundamental to remember that all parties who were involved in the conflict debated territorial boundaries and the legal status of their respective lands — contesting sovereignty based on historical myths, either written or interpreted by those Soviet historians who served the interests of the Communist Party of the USSR. In fact, even before this period, Russian ethnographers and geographers in the nineteenth century started to classify languages and people of the South Caucasus by assigning priority to race and religion (Broers, 2010: 9). Whereas in the Soviet period most of the borders were drawn by Stalin and his colleagues, who kept in mind the distribution of resources and land, and thus positioned industries in a way that became the source of problems during the reform (Gorbachev, 1995: 329).

Therefore, the historic context did acquire a significant position in the political narrative of 1980s.

Georgian scholars have debated the opportunities that Georgia could have availed itself of at the end of the eighteenth century, had it not signed the Georgievsky Agreement.²³ Most intellectuals thought that Georgia was unable to survive the Islamic encirclement. However, it is uncertain whether that “encirclement” existed at all or was engineered for political goals by Soviet academics. Russia was the choice of a relatively small elite of princes and a King who ruled only half of Georgia (Kartli and Kakheti). In fact, all alternative views were suppressed and excluded from the discussion. Georgian princes who were against closer ties with the Russian Empire were marginalized (Ioseliani, 1895). As a result, the “facts” that became contested in the 1980s were effectively an invented reality that was convenient for the Soviet authorities whilst they engaged in the reengineering of history. The nationalism that triggered the armed confrontations was an imagined artefact produced by the historians of the repressive regime that the nationalists wished to topple. Milman points to how inefficient the feudal administration of Azerbaijan used to be before Tsarist Russia took over the territory (Milman, 1966: 3). Russia represented positive change — that has been the overall message of policies and academics. Yet his monograph was written in 1966 when the Soviet government required additional arguments to legitimize the Russian presence in the South Caucasus. In the 1960s, Armenians started to dispute the legality of Nagorno-Karabakh’s status in Azerbaijan. Soviet authorities were

²³ The Georgievskiy Tractate was an agreement signed between the envoys of the King of Kartli-Kakheti, Erekle II and the Russian Empress Catherine II, which aimed to assure the Russian protection of the Georgian kingdom from Persian invasions.

producing myths to assure the units of the USSR that they belonged to the home of the global proletariat. While history was a mere tool used to legitimize the oppressive Communist regime, nationalist leaders took it literally, building the discourse of independence on myths written and propagated by their very oppressors.

History had become a regulated science that served the Communist Party and its leadership. As a result, when the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the deterioration of relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and Georgians and its autonomous entities — South Ossetia and Abkhazia — observers were quick to conclude that historic legacies and ethnic hatreds embedded in communal memories and the abolition of hierarchical order were the major causes of wars and cleavages. While on the surface historical narrative was the ultimate weapon in fighting the war of words, it was not a given variable or an unalterable truth, but rather an instrument of alienation and division.

4.6. The concept of “political” applied to history

It is worth addressing the issue of the political in the light of the developments that have triggered and escalated conflicts. This is the case when Carl Schmitt’s theory is partially applicable to the theory of securitization and adds explanatory power to it. Any enunciator in the process of securitization works to intensify the antagonism felt toward the issue (Williams, 2003: 516). Jason Glynos and David Howarth offer definitions and evaluations of the concept of the political and argue that it does not

belong to any particular social domain, but rather refer to Claude Lefort (Glynos and Howarth, 2007):

“the political is... revealed, not in what we call political activity, but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured. It appears in the sense that the process whereby society is ordered and unified across its divisions becomes visible. It is obscured in the sense that the locus of politics (the locus in which parties compete and in which a general agency of power takes shape and is reproduced) becomes defined as particular, while the principle which generates the overall configuration is concealed” (in Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 113).

In other words, the meaning that the political allocates during the process that takes place within a society has repercussions. It is about the way the principles are defined and the hierarchy that is allocated to their importance. The context of “political” helps political actors in a process of consolidation. To take the point further, the concept of securitization is closely linked to Carl Schmitt’s thought concerning the construction of enemies and friends in any given social space:

“the distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions. The political enemy need not necessarily be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a

previously determined general norm nor by the judgement of a disinterested and neutral third party” (Schmitt and Strong, 2007: 26-27) .

Making an adversary “the other” does not require any moral or aesthetic differences, albeit the creation of an existential dilemma could make an extreme case where existing general norms and rules cease operation and exceptional order could apply. Creating a sense of urgency and emergency helps the securitizing actor to influence a referent object and achieve a goal. Once a person or an ethnic group is “dehumanized” it becomes legitimate to fight them.

Glynos and Howarth offer Ernesto Laclau’s rendition of a link between the social and the political, where he argues that “any political construction takes place against the background of a range of sedimented practices” and the boundaries between the two definitions change permanently (Laclau in Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 116). In other words, enemies were constructed as many themes were concealed, limiting discourse to the topics and parts of history that remained comfortable for the short-term goals of nationalists. The ‘political’ was the interpretation given to myths, unconfirmed historic events or perceptions of particular individuals; everything else was outside the meaning of politics. Alienating certain groups became a tactic of nationalists. Out-grouping Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis was a “political construction” performed against a “historical” background.

4.7. Perestroika – an attempt to change the unchangeable

In the final part of this chapter, the *Perestroika* is being addressed, an attempt to change the country based on the aforementioned principles. Mikhail Gorbachev encapsulated that long-awaited change in the Soviet Union. He outlined his intentions and offered three directions for reform: the restructuring of the economy (*Perestroika*), acceleration (*Uskorenie*²⁴) and openness (*Glasnost*) (Sakwa, 1998: 77). Gorbachev believed that, the Soviet Union could not cope with economic reforms as it was impossible to continue existence (Gorbachev, 1987, Brown, 1996). *Perestroika* was about increased public participation, a more open information policy, economic reform that was supposed to help the stagnant economy, and “new thinking” — a re-evaluation of foreign policy (Sharlet, 1992: 11). In April 1985, Gorbachev presented some figures to the Politburo meeting that revealed harrowing data about the state of the Soviet economy, where the productivity of the food industry was almost three times lower than in capitalist countries; as a result, the USSR lost 30 per cent of its agricultural produce annually (in Chernyaev, 2000: 27). It was an unambiguous reality that the Communist rule could not compete with the capitalist world, and the change was inexorable.

Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to create an effective government. He was a new type of person in the Communist Party, free of hierarchical prejudices, and a normal person with common sense (Chernyaev, 2000: 14). Prior to Gorbachev, the party leader was required to possess one talent, which implied that he/she had the ability to be “in charge” and “give general instructions” about every issue whilst lacking any particular acumen or expertise (Geller and Nekrich, 1986: 679). Despite Gorbachev’s efforts, the Soviet government struggled to become effective. Ronald

²⁴ This was a Soviet: dream to catch up with the US.

Suny argues that a lack of broad social bases was one of the reasons for this ineffectuality (2003: 492). Sakwa compares this to Walter Bagehot's distinction of the dignified and efficient parts of government, where the dignified part of the constitution was a network of soviets, the Council of Ministers and some declared rights that allowed Stalin to argue that the Soviet constitution was "the most democratic in the world" (1998: 119). Yet, there is a caveat, which is that the meaning and function of the document are defined by the representation of the citizens and their belonging to the legal system (Arendt, 1986: 312) — criteria which the Soviet Constitution could not uphold.

It was Gorbachev's ambition up until the end to re-negotiate the terms and conditions of the USSR and make it a (con)federation, but the USSR did not have a core, as Russians themselves felt to be affected by Soviet ideology and nationalism, so they were unable to fit into the function of the core (Hanson, 2003: 6). This point proves the hybrid nationalism developed by the Bolshevik regime. The confluence of Stalinist theories on ethnicity and the distortion of history created a country that, in the end, was impossible to govern or reform. One cause of perplexity was that of the core ideology that toppled the value of an individual and fomented antagonism. Restrictions on independent thought had produced dire consequences for the system and its reformers. The Communist regime prohibited agents from thinking and contributing to the evolution of the system. Such a tendency made the USSR immune to change, as the system wiped out the virtue of thinking from the institutional memory of the population, which created a 'pause' in the mutual construction of social reality. There were no agents left to shape the structure, which eventually collapsed. It is a striking fact that the regime that endorsed Darwin's

theory of evolution in its curriculums neglected its fundamental principle: the need for constant change and adaptation in order to survive and remain the fittest. In fact, the centre of the USSR was the Communist Party which was a very closed and isolated group — a party that was preponderant in social fragmentation and polarization, and which resisted reforms. It was a glorification of a rigid ideology that failed to ascertain the functions of the core institution. In other words, the Party sought total control over the state and the people yet had no capacity to adjust to change.

In Gorbachev's vision, *Perestroika* was a qualitatively new kind of growth that implied the "intensification of production on the basis of scientific and technological progress, the structural reorganisation of the economy, improved management and better incentives for labour" (Sakwa, 1998: 77). He was prepared to pursue this goal, notwithstanding obstacles, and was determined to successfully integrate the Soviet Union into the world community by peaceful means (Brown, 1996: 102). Gorbachev himself described this course as "an urgent necessity arising from the profound processes of development in our socialist society" (1987: 17). Despite being unsure about the final outcome of his reform project, Gorbachev was clear that he could give "socialism the most progressive forms of social organization; it is the fullest exposure of the humanist nature of our social system" (1987: 35). In his view, the idea that the USSR was a "problem-free" system had backfired (Gorbachev, 1987: 22). Yet speaking about this much-needed change, he hailed Lenin's principles because they were "in the minds and hearts of the millions of people" (Gorbachev, 1987: 25) and he was inclined to think that he was not in a position to alter that reality. Apparently his vision was not prepared to admit the mistakes of the previous leaders. When addressing the issues of collectivisation and industrialization, he

argues that that was the only way to “rehabilitate” the country (Gorbachev, 1987: 41). It might be said that the system was intoxicated by doctrines and unchangeable dogmas, which could be considered the main reason of the failure of reforms. Could Gorbachev have handled things better? Perhaps the answer is closer to the negative: it is highly unlikely. Archie Brown suggests that Gorbachev unknowingly opened “a Pandora’s box” that revealed suppressed grievances and, most importantly, new demands that exposed him to challenges he was unable to withstand (Brown, 1996: 13). Another feasible argument is proposed by Eero Loone, who suggests that Perestroika could not revitalise socialism but rather transformed Soviet societies into early capitalist ones (1993: 741). This is because Gorbachev was incapable of challenging the “fundamentals”, albeit he hoped to make the reform “dynamic and politically meaningful” (1987: 54).

A primary dilemma of the Soviet authorities was working towards a “mono-organisational society” wherein the regime was not regulating activities but was mostly preoccupied with *directing* them (Rigby, 1980: 19). In other words, the government did not work to improve the norms and rules that could allow a society to operate, but rather issued directives that enlisting individuals for particular tasks (Rigby, 1980: 19). The regime was focusing on task-fulfilment that restricted the freedoms of individuals, as they did not want society to evolve. The economic five-year plans were a good example of such policies. The keyword for the authorities was “*zadanie*” i.e. ‘task’ — a criterion that was used to measure the success of writers, teachers, judges and others that is reminiscent of a military order that “mobilises” resources and peoples to fulfil operation tasks — thus ideologically preparing them to “struggle” for “victory” on various fronts, including factories,

farms (*kolkhoz*), theatres and other institutions (Rigby, 1980: 20). To take this idea further, the system promoted “task-achieving” people who were in complete harmony with it (Rigby, 1980: 20); it guaranteed that no independent individuals could break into it. The idea of achieving full Communism was the goal that legitimised the regime.

The Soviet Union failed to re-invent itself in a new age of change. Accordingly, reforms launched by the new leadership could not deliver positive results for society. As Sakwa notes, a negative destructive logic loomed over perestroika, which appeared to be unable to construct comprehensible political institutions (Sakwa, 1998: 77). Institutions were instrumental in replacing the Communist party and assure transition from a planned order to a market economy (Sakwa, 1998: 77). Yet those institutions were not flexible and vibrant enough to withstand the pressure and produce new policies, or to offer new opportunities to the stakeholders.

Sakwa suggests that the authors of perestroika acknowledged deep problems that petrified the Soviet system but which failed to offer a credible and adequate programme to tackle those acknowledgements (Sakwa, 1998: 77). In other words, perestroika failed in its implementation. It was a well-manifested project that promised to destroy the Soviet prison from within, but eventually the USSR ceased to exist. One could argue that the Soviet system was insubstantial, as it was a caricature of socialism. In fact, it was a truly totalitarian state that failed as a result of its isolation and superficiality.

In tracing the reasons behind the failure of reform in the times of Perestroika, we need to return to the founding principles of the USSR. The Bolsheviks were uncompromising toward dissenting thoughts and did everything to fight pluralism. It

was not a revolt against the monarchy of the Romanov house, but a full-scale war against free-thinking people. By attacking the intellectual elite back in the 1920s, they destroyed the nucleus that could have ensured development of Russia as a state and as a society. Yet Lenin personally oversaw the deportation or slaughter of intellectuals across the country (Lenin, 2003). In the letter to Stalin in 1922, he orders the deportation of certain members of the Popular Socialists, whom he considers more “harmful” than any other socialist revolutionary because they are “more clever” (Lenin, 2003: 117). Bolsheviks waged the most devastating epistemic warfare against Russia and its provinces. Millions of people were killed or were forced to flee Russia, an intellectual exodus that Russia never recovered from. It was a life-threatening crime to be clever or to possess an opinion in the new Russia that was ordered to convert to Communism. The creation of a country where every citizen was forced to have the same view and exposed to daily epistemic violence backfired during the *Perestroika*. It appeared that the Soviet Union did not have the intellectual resources to adjust and reform.

Glasnost provided a chance for the political leaders of union republics to speak up, however the central authorities in Moscow were not prepared to digest that freedom of expression. They were used to review and permit editorial themes, receive editors’ reports and discuss them during the Party plenums (Hill and Frank, 1981: 133). Having been accustomed to such a degree of involvement in the work of the media, it was perplexing for the authorities to adjust to openness. Prior to the official policy of *Glasnost*, the press was regarded as the servant of the party with the aim to “educate the Soviet public” and support government policies (Hill and Frank, 1981: 133). The Party obliged everybody to listen to them, whilst the change now

required the Communists to take note of others' opinions. The task was too complex, and the Party was mostly unprepared. Nationalism and history crafted a discourse that emphasized enmity and differences. The freedom to speak turned out to be a freedom to manipulate history and oppress the lower units of the Soviet hierarchy.

4.8. Unchangeable

The prominent philosopher Petr Egides argues that the state was not truly socialist. He was sent to a mental hospital and later was forced to leave the USSR. Egides openly attacked the dogmatism of the Soviet ideology (1967), accusing the party ideologists of creating algorithms and forcing a society to live according to those algorithms (Egides, 1967: 107). He writes that many party officials were “afraid to come forward” and speak up against the “specific perpetrators of the algorithmization of man and against specific algorithms” (Egides, 1967: 107). In other words, there were dissenting voices who prepared the soil for Gorbachev to announce change.

The USSR failed because of the huge economic pressure as the GNP, including the large-scale military sector that made an insignificant contribution to domestic economy whilst exploiting a large proportion of raw materials (White, 2001: 44). Additionally, in a time when Western societies progressed toward post-industrial service economies, the USSR still focused on producing goods to meet centrally specified targets that had little relation to social needs (Sakwa, 1998: 285, White, 2001: 44-46). In addition to these challenges, the absence of foreign competition due to a closely regulated market worsened conditions (White, 2001: 46). Even

before Gorbachev, the USSR was using 80 per cent more resources for one industrial output than the US in fixed assets, 60 per cent more in materials, 110 per cent more energy and 100 per cent more in shipping (Scanlan, 1992: 24). Considering the figures and this state of affairs, it becomes apparent that the country was wasting its material and human resources and failing to produce economic growth.

The Soviet planning system did not match resources to capacity as a means to stimulate growth of economy that made economy commanded rather than planned (Sakwa, 1998: 278). Gorbachev's initiative could not alter the economic system that as Philip Hanson argues was an outcome of the limits of the system itself, rooted in the industrialisation of 1930s (2003: 6). These Soviet foundations ruled out the existence of a private sector in the economy, and it was aimed at stripping away everything personal. Therefore, this systemic vacuum could not allow a private sector to prosper (Hanson, 2003: 236)

The *Perestroika* was intended to change a system that had been designed to withstand change (Sakwa, 1998: 285). The project was ambitious as it tested the entire system of values and economic organization of the Union led by Russia. If Russian history is viewed from the perspective of reforms and the reaction of society, Peter the Great and Stalin were despots who relinquished society for the sake of modernization (Sakwa, 1998: 286). Perhaps they enforced cultures and agendas that were alien to Russia and its people. However, the Great Reforms launched by Alexander II and Gorbachev's *Perestroika* involved the political activation of citizenry (1998: 287). Sakwa's parallels are noteworthy as both attempts at liberalization failed. The revolutionaries toppled the monarchy and *Perestroika* destroyed the USSR.

This was a system that *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* were designed to reform. Gorbachev believed in the possibility of change in the USSR. Yet change ultimately appeared to be impossible due to the enumerated causes and dilemmas. As Kenneth Waltz explains, systems are either maintained or transformed (1979: 199). In this particular instance, it was neither maintained nor transformed.

4.9. Summary

This chapter has addressed the perils of the Soviet ethno-nationalism and operationalisation of history in developing the verbal fabric of post-Soviet political discourse. As mentioned above, “any political construction takes place against the background of a range of sedimented practices” and those practices were actively used in the nation-building in the aftermath of the USSR. Ethno-nationalism was instrumentalized and inserted into the discourse of differentiation. One could see that historical and ethnographic scholarship were transformed into an ideological powerhouse of Soviet-era party elites. The isolated life of scholars created fertile soil for such scientific distortions. They did not participate in international debates, nor had they enjoyed the broad access to literature and resources available to their colleagues in the Western Europe or the US. Arts and humanities and social sciences had a peripheral status in academia in the USSR. These marginalised scholars, representing separate groups of historians, held radicalised views of the past that are apparent in all three conflicts in the South Caucasus. As mentioned earlier, they had forgotten or ignored the fact that the “validity of counter discourses count no more and no less than those of the discourses in power ”(Habermas, 1987). Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Georgians and Abkhazians, and Georgians and Ossetians used the

stories to mobilise the in-groups against the out-groups. Such operationalisation of historiography and ethnography made an 'in-group' of 'indigenous' people a privileged class, but almost outlawed the 'out-group' of 'newcomers' or guests. As Victor Shnirelman argues, this history escalated the crisis in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South-Ossetia (2001: 387).

5. Chapter Five

Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia and Azerbaijan on the Brink

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the jurisdiction in Nagorno-Karabakh. If Georgia went to war with itself, with conflicts

erupting in two of its three autonomous entities, then Armenia and Azerbaijan went to war over an ethnically mixed Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority autonomous district (oblast) of Azerbaijan. The operationalization of history was and remains one of the key paradigms that characterises the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The nationalities policies employed across the USSR by its founders caused the initial dispute over the jurisdiction of the territory. Nagorno-Karabakh was an ethnically Armenian enclave in the South of Azerbaijan, close to the Armenian border. The Soviet authorities in 1920s decided to grant the territory to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, while also awarding it autonomous status. Ever since then, the issue has been on the agenda of Armenian nationalists, who believe that it is a matter of historic justice to return the province to Armenia.

As mentioned previously, this current section will demonstrate the significance of discourse in Yerevan, Baku and Moscow (because the conflict started in the Soviet period in 1988) during the crisis, and will attempt to explain the reason for the escalation of armed conflict in the region. It will describe the events that unfolded and will offer an analysis that emphasizes the role of the formation of a dominant nationalist and historic narrative, as well as the role of Gorbachev's policies in contributing to the crisis. When addressing the actions or in-actions of the Kremlin, one has to bear in mind that the members of the Politburo were politicians whose ideas and words (statements) were especially crucial in the time of Perestroika. To what extent was the Nagorno-Karabakh a litmus test for Gorbachev's Perestroika? Whose political agenda failed and whose prevailed in the conflict? How was this enmity constructed and how did it escalate? How did certain performatives securitise ethnicity?

The case of Nagorno-Karabakh vividly demonstrates the way in which the priorities assigned to particular symbols transformed the republics and established enmity. As is demonstrated in the third chapter of this thesis, one has to look into the “symbolic power” that was assigned both to the past and to nationalism. It is possible to explain the trend of securitization by examining the narratives that circulated and were used as “capacities of management” (Bigo 2000). This chapter guides the reader through those practices that are “heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes emotions, etc.), which are contextually mobilised by a securitising actor” as they worked to prompt an audience “to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about critical vulnerability” (see Balzacq chapter 3).

Those are the questions around which this chapter revolves; it will begin with an introduction to the enmities constructed throughout the Soviet period, then will address the Armenian discourse on Nagorno-Karabakh. It will also include the reactions of Gorbachev’s government to the pogroms and describe Azerbaijan’s response. Overall, it describes the process of the securitization of Armenians in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis in Armenia, and it demonstrates how certain political actors abused their authority to undermine peace and inflict divisions in order to gain public support for their struggle toward power in the post-Soviet reality.

This problem was largely ignored by the Soviet authorities who assured the parties that the USSR was one common home of all nations and that the borders did not matter at all. But, in the 1980s, when the end of the USSR was drawing near, and when self-determination and freedom became often-heard words across the area,

borders and ethnicity acquired symbolic power as the political agenda was in a state of rapid transformation.

Gorbachev's ideals consisted of platitudes that acknowledged the need for reform, but which were lacking in detail. By introducing a new concept to Soviet citizens, Gorbachev attempted to reconcile the dignified and efficient components of the government (the Council of Ministers and the Politburo) (see chapter 4), but his approach instead caused the collapse of both (Sakwa, 1998: 119). In an ethnonational state like the USSR, *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* were dangerous instruments as they granted an opportunity to the latent resentments to be awoken (Hunter, 1994: 99) and at the same time distorted certain aspects of debates that were vulnerable to misinterpretation. Mostly, the government did not thoroughly think through the perils and perplexities of opening up a closed state. It is debatable as to whether Gorbachev and his team had foreseen the unintended consequences of *Perestroika* and if they had a contingency plan for the crisis. In their analysis, Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda note that, by 1987, *Glasnost* was mainly a cover for the nationalities question (1990: 265). In other words, *Glasnost* brought the question to the public domain, and it became acceptable to openly address the issue. Problems relating to nationality were on the front-pages of newspapers, and Soviet television brought up the complexity and intricacy of the issue to the homes of millions of viewers (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 265). The same authors note that the Kremlin, as well as the authorities in republican capitals, ignored the voices of non-Russians regarding national issues (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 263). It is thought that *Glasnost* helped the national movements in activating their voices and,

according to Nahaylo and Swoboda, the question over the national hierarchy became the dominant problem.²⁵

The case of Nagorno-Karabakh is a perfect demonstration of these two failures. On the one hand, the Soviet government proved itself to be politically insolvent and on the other, the local political elites demonstrated a willingness to use hostile discourses in their fight for power. They securitised almost every aspect of life: nationality, history, ethnicity, which laid the foundation for the public involvement in the cross-border enmity. In the space of a few days, Armenians and Azerbaijanis found themselves to be enemies. The rise of nationalism in Armenia spurred the same sentiments in Azerbaijan, and both groups focused on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh (Hunter, 1994: 99). The political life of these two countries was basically constituted by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (Neumann, 1993: 1). It could be argued that modern Armenia and Azerbaijan formed their post-Soviet states based on a mutual antagonism over Nagorno-Karabakh, an antagonism that continues to this day.

The paradigms that defined and shaped the South Caucasian conflict circle raise the question of the value of independence, and sovereignty along with security. As Tamara Dragadze notes, further analysis is necessary because “crude are the sentiments involved and tragic the consequences of communal hatred” (1989: 69). This chapter will interrogate how ethnicity, history and nationalism were tools for the escalation of the dispute over the territorial belonging of Nagorno-Karabakh.

²⁵ See Chernyaev in chapter 4

5.1. Nagorno-Karabakh

The constitution of the USSR was a complex document that regulated the hierarchical order of the state. Nagorno-Karabakh was the Autonomous *Oblast* (NKAO) within the Azerbaijani SSR. The term *Oblast* meant that the region had fewer rights than, e.g., Abkhazia (see ch. 3). The enclave served as a bone of contention between the two republics during the Soviet period. Armenians complained that Nagorno-Karabakh was economically backward because Azerbaijan could not manage it properly. They then proceeded to reference the fact of the Armenian majority in Nagorno-Karabakh, and to request Armenian jurisdiction over the oblast. *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* strengthened the debate and gave hope to Armenians in particular (Mutafian, 1994, Hunter, 1994). This crisis was the first harbinger of the disintegration process of the USSR. Nagorno-Karabakh was the first problem to be handled in the era of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* that shows that the government of the Soviet Union was capable of reform and transformation, as well as able to deal with a complex crisis that involved nationalities, policies, and intra-union borders. The *Oblast* was one of those many areas of the USSR that had a status and had rights on paper according to the Constitution, but which in fact did not have any of them in practice (Panossian, 2001: 147). Gorbachev faced a Soviet government with a huge bureaucracy that never accepted the need for reform and change. Gorbachev and his allies hailed the possibilities of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, yet Gorbachev knew that the transformation of the system had to be launched by transforming peoples' minds and assurance that they (people) understand the objectives of change, he wanted

the goals (change and reform) to be all encompassing and inclusive.²⁶ He wanted to involve the public, which one has to note was not used to engagement and dialogue with the government.²⁷ As Gorbachev (1995) writes in his memoirs, it was impossible to proceed the way the USSR existed, and there was an imminent need for reforms. Despite the general acknowledgment of the need for change, it ended up being the single biggest challenge the USSR faced since the Second World War.

Nagorno-Karabakh was the first legal, territorial and political dispute in the South Caucasus and in the Soviet Union. It started in 1988, before the fall of the Berlin Wall — a symbol of Soviet power in the Western World. Technically speaking, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis was still under control of the Soviet administration and the USSR was responsible for peace and security within its borders. However, as the crisis showed, the resources (political governance, the mobilisation of forces) to handle the situation existed mostly on paper, making the Kremlin elites incapable of dealing with the consequences of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Gorbachev did not create a special committee, nor did he agree to take direct control over Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁸ When he did it was too late, as deadly clashes were already taking place between the two sides.

In contrast with other fellow republics of the USSR, the national movement in Azerbaijan had developed slowly, as they were “informal groups” concerned with environmental issues (Hunter, 1994: 66). Shireen Hunter notes that many such

²⁶ Gorbachev, M. 1986. Address to the Assembly of the Communist Party. http://www.lib.ru/MEMUARY/GOBACHEV/doklad_xxvi.txt [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

²⁷ The Soviet people were not electing leaders and did not have a say in how the country was governed, hence Gorbachev addressed the need for inclusiveness.

²⁸ Parfenev, L. 1988. Karabakh Nevozmozhno Peredat' Armenii. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hvyzNPsoxc> [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

groups were created by Moscow in order to fulfil the new “openness” agenda, yet the government was unprepared for the transformation of these groups into civil society actors (1994: 66). Hunter observes that many of the groups had changed the course (openness) and did not cooperate with the government. Further, she argues that openness offered opportunities to all subjugated peoples who vented their cultural, religious or national frustrations (Hunter, 1994: 66). Yet leaders of those groups, who led the nationalist movements across the region, managed the selection of topics for public discussion. They emphasized divisions but refrained from mentioning commonalities. This strengthened the nationalist movement in Azerbaijan, as they were confronted by the demands of their Armenian colleagues. The hyper-inflation of national tensions in Armenia has encouraged and empowered Azerbaijan’s national movement. The ‘Popular Front’ of Azerbaijan was a gathering of academic figures who initially aimed to “facilitate Perestroika in Azerbaijan” (Hunter, 1994: 68, Swietochowski, 1995: 199). Their programme aimed to enhance the political and cultural sovereignty of Azerbaijan within the USSR (Hunter, 1994: 69).

As tensions were rising in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh became the tipping point that possessed the capacity to consolidate public opinion in favour of the nationalist groups. This tiny part of a mountainous enclave in Azerbaijan became a symbol of the new Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh was a symbolic capital that, in the end, both parties used to mobilise the public. Suren Aivazian, a geologist, wrote an extensive letter to the USSR leader Gorbachev on 5 March 1987, that launched the Armenian appeal. It was signed by thousands of workers from Nagorno-Karabakh who opposed this historical injustice:

“The exclusion of the Mountainous Karabagh and Nakhichevan from Armenia represents the highest expression of injustice, contradicting the articles in the laws of boundaries of the Soviet Union as laid down according to Leninist principles. Nakhichevan in the consciousness of the Armenian people has the same place as Moscow or Novgorod have in the consciousness of the Russian people” (Libaridian, 1988: 81).²⁹

Firstly, Aivazian referred to the meeting between the high-profile Bolshevik leaders in 1921 that defined the fate of boundaries of Armenia and Azerbaijan within the Soviet Union. Ever since then, Armenians had felt that the allocation of lands in the South Caucasus was unjust and expressed hope to change the state of affairs. Aivazian laid down the Armenian position on the Azerbaijani SSR. Armenians thought that Azerbaijan was founded on the territory of Eastern Armenia and “Mountainous Tatars” started to call themselves Azerbaijanis, which further inflamed the situation (Libaridian, 1988: 81). Aivazian challenged the right of Azerbaijanis, i.e. the ‘Turks’, to exercise sovereignty on the territory of Azerbaijan and Baku in particular, as they were a minority in the republic. As a result, Armenians felt disadvantaged in two ways: Nagorno-Karabakh was given to Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, an autonomous oblast between Turkey and Armenia was allocated to Baku as well (Libaridian, 1988: 81). According to the letter at least, Nakhichevan should be part of Armenia as it is stipulated in the law on boundaries of the USSR (Libaridian, 1988: 81). Drawing on the ethnic differences across the region, the dispatch is openly anti-Azerbaijani, accusing them of the forced migration of Armenians both from Nakhichevan and

²⁹ The book is a primary source, it is a collection of all official documents related to the conflict translated into English and published by the Zoryan Institute

Nagorno-Karabakh (Libaridian, 1988: 82). Aivazian then turns to historic sites and monuments:

“But if people can abandon their homes, move away and create a new home, then what should become of historical monuments? These are being destroyed barbarously by the vandals of the 20th century for the mere reason that they are Armenian ... There have already been such practices with the Armenian khatchkars [stone-carved crosses]. The "enthusiastic" Azerbaijani historians have started to vandalize cemeteries; they have declared the Armenian khatchkars to be the artwork of the Islamic Turks” (Libaridian, 1988: 82).

For Armenians, Katchkars are significant artefacts or signposts that epitomize Armenianess, they are reminders of who they are as a people as they have been a symbol that marks Armenian lands for centuries (Tchilingirian, 1999: 438).

Armenians accused Azerbaijanis of stealing their history, cultural heritage and architectural monuments. At the same time, one author noted that a book published in Moscow about Azerbaijan’s architecture did not include the most important monument Gandzasar Vank (a thirteenth-century Armenian monastery in Nagorno-Karabakh (Tchilingirian, 1999: 438)), which is another symbol of Armenia (Libaridian, 1988: 82). Aivazian described Armenian fury over the classification of ancient Armenian monuments, allowing Azerbaijanis to present them as “Turkish” (Libaridian, 1988: 82). In his letter he complained about the unfair treatment of Armenian scholars traveling to Azerbaijan to explore the monuments (Libaridian, 1988: 83). Further, he made multiple allegations about ethnic belonging, suppressed the rights of Armenians in Azerbaijan, and asked Gorbachev what, precisely, the Armenians had contributed to the Soviet homeland — hence they were entitled to

the jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan, which accounted for 80 per cent of Armenians in 1913 compared to only 1.5 per cent in 1988 (Libaridian, 1988: 82). Aivazian called on the Moscow authorities to give fair treatment to the Armenian people, taking into account the number of Armenians who died in ‘the Great Patriotic War’ [sic] (the WWII was defined in the USSR as a ‘Great Patriotic War’, and even the dates were changed to 1941-1945) (Libaridian, 1988: 83). Armenians made the biggest sacrifice in the Second World War compared to all the other nations in the South Caucasus, and now they asked for the share of the right to justice they thought Armenia deserved (Libaridian, 1988: 84). Aivazian defined Nagorno-Karabakh as the part of Eastern Armenia that had to be re-united with the rest of the nation (Libaridian, 1988: 84). The letter emphasized anti-Turkish sentiments among Armenians and stipulated that it was a Turkish plan to annihilate Armenians, and that Azerbaijan was completing that mission in the USSR (Mutafian, 1994: 148).

5.1.1. Performing “justice”

The letter demonstrates the way in which performatives can be used to support the idea of national unity, to re-gain control over Nagorno-Karabakh. As already explained in the third chapter of this thesis, performatives are words that have the power to transform and change social reality. They are acts that help to secure “differentiation, classification and definition” as the way of identification (see Campbell ch. 2). Indicating that the Armenian people are asking for justice because the separation of the “Mountainous Karabagh and Nakhichevan from Armenia represents the highest **expression of injustice**” directly *does* things with words, as it

assures the total support for mobilisation in the name of a goal. As explained in chapter 3, when a speech concentrates on symbolic capital, it has the capacity to construct public opinion. There is a “plot of security” (Wæver ch. 3), the enunciator refers to social capital, and there are threat-related conditions (see ch. 3).

Aivazian writes that “according to the law of boundaries of the Soviet Union, any autonomous region located within a republic must be under the jurisdiction of that republic”,³⁰ and he refers to the law which contradicts the “articles in the laws of boundaries of the Soviet Union” according to “Leninist principles” and symbolises the provinces by comparing them to a Russian example: “Nakhichevan in the consciousness of the Armenian people has the same place as Moscow or Novgorod have in the consciousness of the Russian people” (Libaridian, 1988: 81). In other words, he implies an ideological interpretation of events, and “symbolizes” Nagorno-Karabakh (see Fairclough 2001). Aivazian applies different modifiers to Azerbaijanis including, “Turks”, “Tatars” or “Islamic Turks” that are performatives (**“Turks”, “Tatars” or “Islamic Turks”**) in their own right, as they help to alienate the Azerbaijani people, make them enemies, and imply their complicity in the Armenian Genocide of 1915 (see Masih and Krikorian, 1999: 8). The term ‘genocide’ became a speech act as well.³¹ Sumgait was branded as a genocide too, and as Dudwick observes “every social and political problem took on additional significance as containing a threat to the Armenians” (1989: 64). These performatives are “justificatory strategies” (see ch.3) that help to “regulate” the way of thinking about an issue (in this case, Azerbaijanis). It is vital to consider these texts and letters as

³⁰ The enunciator from the Armenian side, a person who drafted the letter to Gorbachev.

³¹ It was the same in Georgian-Abkhaz discourse — see the following chapter

policymaking and opinion-forming tools that manipulated adjectives and in a Schmittian (see chapter 4) sense made Azerbaijanis non-humans, who had to be evicted from Armenia and other territories claimed by Armenia. To borrow Derrida's clarification, "performative communications become communication of an intentional meaning", which implies the totality of the operation, and indicates that no one among the public can escape the totalization (Derrida, 1982: 322). Totalization implies that the discourse will involve the majority of the public and affect their opinion. The words of Aivazian (who had full support of the Karabakh Committee) were vehicles for the nationalists' intentions towards other rivals — in this case, Azerbaijanis.

The majority of Armenians, Azerbaijanis or other Soviet people would have hardly ever thought about the *justice/injustice* dichotomy in Armeno-Azerbaijani relations within the USSR. However, the affiliation of Azerbaijanis to Turks shows how discourse objects are the results of recombination and distortion of certain concepts that previously were interpreted differently. *Turks, Tatars and injustice* are keywords with intentional meaning that help to label Azerbaijanis and make them an out-group.

Aivazian's appeal was followed by declarations by prominent members of Armenian society, including the writer Zori Balayan³², historian Sergei Mikoyan and the economist Abel Aganberyan, who had been Gorbachev's economic advisor. Aganberyan openly declared that he "would like to hear that Nagorno-Karabagh has

³² Balayan is a renowned writer and author of *Between Heaven and Hell: the struggle for Karabakh*. Another his work "Ochag" (Hotbed) published in 1984 caused outrage in Azerbaijan. One can argue that his books have triggered the discourse of Armenian conspiracy in Azerbaijan.

been returned to Armenia” and that the problem should be settled “in the context of *perestroika* and democracy” (Mutafian, 1994: 148, Geukjian, 2012: 131). Subsequently, these announcements were followed by various individual and collective letters sent to Moscow that were full of accusations and demands to return Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR. The Armenian Democratic Liberal Organization in the USA appealed to Gorbachev during his visit to the US. The letter followed the general line of Armenian demands, and stated that reunification with Armenia would “rectify historic errors which were committed during the formation of the Soviet Union” (Libaridian, 1988: 107). The US-based organization asked for reassurance of Armenia’s territorial integrity, and the prevention of the expansion of “the inhuman imperialism of the Pan-Turanist movement” and help for Armenia’s economic growth, “to allow any Armenian to return to ancestral homeland; to create opportunities for the Diaspora Armenians to contribute to Armenia and to invest in its future” (Libaridian, 1988: 109). Another of the dispatches accused Azerbaijan’s authorities of “a genocide” against Armenian nationals from 1920 to 1987 (Mutafian, 1994: 148). By the end of 1987 the situation had deteriorated, as Azerbaijanis were accused of attempts to drive out the Armenian population from the villages bordering the NKAO (Mutafian, 1994: 148). Once the news had spread to Yerevan, tensions increased, bringing public figures Silva Kaputikian, Maro Markarian and Victor Hambarstumian into the spotlight of the national discourse (Mutafian, 1994: 149).

5.1.2. “Turkey” as a Speech Act

There was a further letter allegedly drafted by Suren Aivazian and signed by 75,000 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. It was in the form of a memorandum addressed to Mikhail Gorbachev and it expressed nationalistic sentiments as well as raising security issues regarding residents of the oblast (Libaridian, 1988: 86).³³ The authors openly assigned a great role to the territory by situating it in the broader Russo-Turkish discourse. By emphasizing the word “Turkish” the text figured as another performative that promoted enmity, i.e. Armenians attempted to make the Karabakh problem an issue of Soviet foreign policy, by associating it with Turkey. Nagorno-Karabakh thus became an existential problem for Armenia, a matter of memory, principle and dignity. It rallied a nation around the flag with the demand for “historic justice”, which was also a powerful performative used by Armenians:

“Over many centuries its geographic position has made Armenia a garrison for Russia and the most important strategic centre. For centuries Armenia has also shed its blood particularly during Russo-Turkish wars. It was gradually losing the space necessary for its existence, its national core. By occupying Armenian territories, and faithful to its barbarian policy of *fait accompli*, Turkey in 1915-16 organized the Genocide of the Armenians, which reached monstrous proportions. When creating the Soviet State V. I. Lenin took into consideration the political situation in which Armenians found themselves” (Libaridian, 1988: 86).

The letter to Gorbachev illustrates how the Armenian intellectuals perceived the conflict, and called on the Kremlin to react. Turkey, a NATO member, was not among the friendly nations of the USSR. Additionally, Muslims historically had a reputation

³³ Libaridian thinks that the letter was written by Aivazian, but sent by a group of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.

as the conquerors of Christian Armenians and Georgians. A brief history of both nations could be described as a timeline of battles between the Persian and Ottoman empires, with an emphasis on religion. The wording of the appeal is reminiscent of the Soviet-era history books that presented Armenia and Georgia as the last Christian garrisons on the Eastern edge of Europe. For both Armenia and Georgia, the Russian Empire, and later on the Soviet Union, were guarantors of their existence. Despite the widespread atheism, there always existed the sense of shared religion with Russia in the form of Christianity — because Armenians are Gregorian, and Georgians are Orthodox, hence Christianity was a unifying doctrine. To a certain extent, the Soviets re-branded history and introduced the ‘evil’ notion of Islam — the Persian and Ottoman Empire — so that the Soviet Union was depicted “as a lesser of two evils” (see Masih and Krikorian, 1999: xxix, Malkasian, 1996: 57). The school curriculum in history focused on the negative aspects of relations with Ottomans or Persians and emphasized religious difference, as it included stories of martyrs who were punished by Muslims for their belief in Christ (see Lortkipanidze and Asatiani, 1993). The books were always emphasizing the oppressive policies of Persian Shahs who forced Georgians in particular, to apostatize and become Muslim, or fought wars over the possession of Armenia (Forsyth, 2013: 188 and 195).

Returning to the letter, one should mention the significance of Lenin in the debate. It is worth noting that Lenin’s approaches were widely mentioned during the Politburo discussion of the issue that is described later in this chapter. Armenians attempted to combine Lenin’s proletarian vision with conservative nationalism and asked the Gorbachev administration to help their cause in order to legitimise their appeal. Leninism in this context is became a tool that could be used to ‘prove’ to the

Communist Party the best intentions of the letter's authors. Lenin was given the role of arbiter of the Armenian requests (see chapter 4). There was the principle or implied rule, that every idea expressed or communicated to a Soviet citizen had to start with admiration for Lenin and his product — the Great October Revolution. As Ronald Suny and Michael Kennedy note, it was hard to imagine an apolitical intellectual responsibility under Communism, and submission to that political stance was an act of refusal of intellectual responsibility (1999: 10). Apparently, nationalist groups still adhered to the Communist rulebook when drafting the appeal. The letter addresses historic details about the fate of Armenian territories that ended up within Azerbaijan's borders in the 1920s. The authors express concern about the ever-increasing "Turkish" population in Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1979 the USSR census showed a 23 per cent growth among the Azerbaijani population of Karabakh, compared to the figures of 1926, —although there were 123,000 Armenians and 37,264 Azerbaijanis and notably 350,000 Armenians living in other parts of Azerbaijan while only 161,000 Azerbaijanis lived in Armenia (Baguirov, 2008: 14, Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 285). Turks served as symbols of an enemy that sought to annihilate the entire ethnos of the Armenians. Hence, by referring to Azerbaijanis as Turks, the problem becomes an existential threat. It is also an example of a "constituting statistic" (see Bigo chapter 3) that assigns a category to the information and creates a certain regime of truth:

"By stepping over the Leninist principles of nationalities policy, by separating historic territories from Soviet Armenia and incorporating them in Soviet Azerbaijan, it is as if someone in the past was working in favour of the interests of the Soviet Union's enemy Turkey, which is the guardian of imperialism, backwardness and aggression in the south of our country" (Libaridian, 1988: 87).

Armenian authors protest against the name of Karabakh, which does not demonstrate its ethnical affiliation to Armenia, whilst all other autonomies in the USSR were named after the ethnic groups (e.g. Abkhazia, Tatarstan) (Libaridian, 1988: 87). The Armenian memo ends with an appeal to Gorbachev to respect **historic justice** and reunite the Armenian lands of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan with the homeland (Libaridian, 1988: 88).

The active participation of the intelligentsia in the discourse of the period, and the internationalization of the issue, radicalized the public. Azerbaijani people who were next-door neighbours for decades ended up being designated Turks. As mentioned, an elaborate institutional memory gave space to nationalist groups. The words 'Azerbaijan' and 'Azeri' became performatives, words associated with Turks and consequently linked to the genocide of 1915, and thus still capable of genocide and harming Armenian nationals. This was a reference to the memories, analogies and emotions of the public pointing to the critical vulnerability of identity and nationality. The Azerbaijanis were enemies who threatened a vulnerable Armenian nation; this enmity implied the religious difference and historic mission to serve as a bastion of Christianity. Turkey was perceived in the context of medieval wars over the lands of Armenia and influence in the South Caucasus (see Coulie, 2013: 41, Cox and Eibner, 1993: 14).³⁴ Additionally, there was a division between the Armenian intellectuals regarding the role of Islamism in the conflict. Balayan claimed that pan-Turkism was a threat for Russia as well as Armenia; Khachik Stamboltsyan³⁵ denied

³⁴ It is worth noting that the discourse about the Muslim threat to Transcaucasia became relevant in this period. The public discussed the history of the 16-17th centuries and considered the possibility of Islamisation, as Islam was perceived negatively in Georgian and Armenian historiography, and many intellectuals highlighted the issue during 1980s (See Ivane Javakhishvili, Kartveli Eris Istoria)

³⁵ A member of the Karabakh-Committee, an actor and activist

this, saying that pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism were not relevant (Khronika, 1989). It is worth noting that the isolated communities of the USSR had a very one-dimensional picture of the world order. Every non-Communist country was a “capitalist threat” and the USSR lived in hostile encirclement (see Kennan, 1946). Capitalism and imperialism were major threats to the proletarian Soviet state. The letter uses that same language regarding Turkey, a NATO member, and thus is clearly of the hostile camp. Imperialism and capitalism were synonyms in the vocabulary of a Soviet apparatchik. Turkey was part of *that* (other) world and Armenian authors sought to emphasize that otherness. This appeal rests on symbols, and on historic monuments and the past. The utterance of “Turkey” was used as a speech act that mobilized public opinion as it established a threat. Overall, Armenians demanded “historic justice” as they thought that the main symbols of Armenian nationhood lay in the mountains of Karabakh. The incorporation of such a powerful symbolic capital in the discourse strengthened the influence and capacity of performative words included in the letters discussed above or uttered in the streets of Yerevan.

5.2. Outbreak

In October 1987 Armenians refused to accept the Azeri appointed Sovkhoz director in the village of Chardakhly (Armenian) in North-western Azerbaijan, causing clashes between local party members and fury in Yerevan (Cornell, 1999: 13). The radicalisation reached its peak with mutual accusations and the dismissal of people based on their ethnic origin (Mutafian, 1994: 148). Azerbaijani officials were tried forcefully to involve the Armenian population of Azerbaijan in joint events. The head of the Shamkhor region, M. Asadov, was accused of forcing Armenian residents to participate in the commemoration of the Soviet Armenian general Baghramian.

Armenians refused to participate, and they gained more support from Yerevan, while the Karabakh Committee, composed of fifteen people, subsequently emerged from the protests (Mutafian, 1994: 148-149).

On 20 February 1988, the authorities of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast summed up the results of the plebiscite and urged the Congress of Public Deputies of the USSR to allow the oblast to join the jurisdiction on Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. A copy of the letter was sent to the governments in Yerevan and Baku. The majority of the population petitioned to join Armenia. The letter was a request for a change of jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR, and the council indicated that they had listened to the opinions of the people's deputies in the NKAO, taking into consideration the "wishes of the workers of the Autonomous Region of Mountainous Karabakh to request the supreme soviets of Azerbaijani and Armenian SSR for the transfer of the region" (Libaridian, 1988: 90). The letter urged the authorities of Armenia and Azerbaijan "to intercede" with the USSR government (Libaridian, 1988: 90). Joseph Masih and Robert Krikorian consider it "naïve" to think that the demands of Armenians were in line with Gorbachev's new thinking (1999: 5).

David Laitin and Ronald Suny question the widely accepted reasons for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (1999: 145). They suggest that ethnic hatreds, which by some scholars are considered to be the cornerstone of the dispute, are supported by little historic evidence and that the antagonism between the Christians and Muslims of the region played only an insignificant role in the contemporary problem (1999: 146). The authors define three major causes of the Karabakh crisis. The number one point is the pattern of "nation-making" that took place in the former Soviet Union,

and that Armenia and Azerbaijan found themselves in a world “in which the nation-states in order to be legitimate, are required to present a cultural community of people who believe that their shared characteristics entitle them to sovereignty in their historic ‘homeland’” (Suny and Laitin, 1999: 146). Accordingly, they based the discourse in the narrative of a nation’s antiquity and continuous inhabitancy of the “historic” homeland — the discourse that place political and cultural boundaries in equilibrium (1999: 146). The majority of political actors at the time wished to depict the nations as older, thus logically more eligible for independence and sovereignty. The Caucasus the diverse region, with a long history of intermingling polities and cultures, although the nationalists stubbornly drew harder and clearer boundaries between their own people and their neighbours (Suny and Laitin, 1999: 146).

Another major pattern was the nationalities policy in the Soviet Union (Suny and Laitin, 1999: 148). The Soviet nation-making practices created the problem of titular nations (those whose names were assigned to the republics) and “minorities” subordinated to the dominant nations (Suny and Laitin, 1999: 148). The most striking was the paradox of the approach: the USSR denied national self-determination, yet at the same time “national loyalty and national consciousness were engendered by emphasis in educational and cultural programs” (Suny and Laitin, 1999: 149). Rogers Brubaker emphasizes this point when he suggests there was an invented nationhood on the sub-state level but no institutionalization at the state level (see Chapter 3). It was already too late when Gorbachev and the Soviet intelligentsia started to talk about this flaw in the system. In part, the reason was the attitude of the system toward intellectuals, as it sought to contain them, make them cooperate with the regime and thus force them to abandon “intellectual responsibility” (Suny and

Kennedy, 1999: 13). Shortly after the clashes in Baku, the issue was raised in the Writer's Union of the USSR by admitting the existence of "acute problems" that were hidden behind the "shiny façade of official pronouncements" (Baruzdin, 1988: 5). Although the head of the Writer's Union of the USSR talks about the possible involvement of Western hostile forces in the escalation of the nationalities issues, he warns that a society cannot let the process "take its own course" that could be incompatible with "our ideology and morality" (Baruzdin, 1988: 5). Yet the assertions sounded more like a platitude, as they were unable to offer new approaches for deliberation.

The third reason outlined is the "rapid collapse of the Soviet State", the weak state authority, and the fragility of nations (Suny and Laitin, 1999: 149). Suny and Laitin suggest that there was a misconception among nationalists or democrats who thought that the old state was a major impediment to the reconstruction of social order, and their revolutionary approach further accelerated the dissolution of the state authority (1999: 149). In the South Caucasus, the nationalists launched an anti-governmental discourse and gained public confidence, to the extent that the public began to express distrust in the Soviet authorities. Nationalism flavoured with freedom and democracy became an attractive commodity. However, as developments revealed, nationalists were not ready to substitute the Soviet apparatchiks, in part because they lacked skills and experience in publicity and populism.

5.3. Sumgait

The tragedy of Sumgait was the most vivid example of mismanagement and a lack of governance in the modern history of the South Caucasus. The Politburo and Gorbachev were drafting letters and statements whilst the situation deteriorated and tensions rose to their highest. The Politburo members apparently did not assess the risks that riots could cause in Sumgait, a small industrial town close to Baku. The minutes show how they approached the harrowing information they had from Baku. The city of two hundred thousand had a big Armenian community. Gorbachev's main goal was to stop the rebellion at any price and allow the government to think about new approaches. The discourse of the discussion demonstrates the level of unpreparedness to face this type of crisis [in the Soviet government], as well as the inability to handle the situation coherently.

According to the Soviet Interior Minister, the youth was rioting and the militia tried to stop them (Sumgait.Info, 1988). However, the youth groups had formed smaller groups and were now rioting in the town. One has to observe that there is a general trend when ethnic entrepreneurs recruit young men already inclined toward violence (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998: 426). Such details of the case illustrate the constructivist character of the conflict. Additionally, there was a careful categorization of victims: they went for Armenians. The Interior Minister had information about 14 dead and 110 wounded, though Gorbachev notes that the situation might have got worse if they had not reacted, surmising that the actions of the militia had prevented the massacre (Sumgait.Info, 1988). However, Malkasian provides a different take and argues that in fact nobody will ever know what took place over the course of those three days in Sumgait (1996: 52). It was said that 26

Armenians died, yet Malkasian insists that it was not about the death toll, rather about the massacre which was “more than massacre” (1996: 52). One can see how the discourse was gradually transforming Sumgait into a symbol of victimhood, making it part of the symbolic capital on par with the Genocide of 1915.

The events in Sumgait again demonstrated the lack of governance and trust in the system. The crowd followed particular actors and the victims responded with violence because the Soviet justice system was flawed. The Politburo in Moscow ordered an investigation of the crimes committed in Sumgait. The minutes show that high profile officials discussed the importance of a “proper investigation”, as even they knew that justice in the realm of the Soviets was far from perfect. Providing that the Politburo members did emphasize the significance of real investigation, it is possible to understand how justice was categorized in the USSR, or, to be more precise, one can see that at any event the Politburo members were aware that the notion of justice did not have a value equal to its representation. The Soviet government had failed to deal with the crisis, but the local actors and nomenclature let down their own people too. The anti-Armenian discourse securitised Armenians as threats to Azerbaijan that had to be neutralised. At the same time, the Politburo did not take any emergency measure to prevent the Sumgait massacres. Gorbachev agreed to involve the military, but without arming them (Sumgait.Info, 1988). According to his belief, the armed forces would have caused far more severe consequences (Gorbachev, 1995: 335). Overnight, Armenians in Sumgait became viewed as a threat to Azerbaijan and massacres started on 27 February 1988.

The first outbreak of violence was in Nagorno-Karabakh, when the Azerbaijani population attempted to block the roads for Armenians traveling to Stepanakert. On

20 February, the local council was convening to discuss the future of the NKAO and join the jurisdiction of the Armenian Soviet Republic. Azerbaijani volunteers, forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Militia had blocked the roads between the rural areas and Stepanakert. They tried to prevent ethnic Armenians from travelling to Stepanakert. On 22 February, residents of the Azerbaijani village Agdam marched toward the nearest Nagorno-Karabakh village, Askeran. They smashed militia points, but official forces managed to dissolve the mass into smaller groups. As a result of violent clashes, two Azerbaijani nationals from Agdam were killed and more than 50 residents of Nagorno-Karabakh were injured, although, according to most sources, at least one of them died at the hands of Azerbaijani militia (Vasilevsky, 1988, Barringer and Keller, 1988)³⁶.

Alexander Katusev, an investigator from Moscow, broke the news that clashes had taken place between the residents of two villages and that two people from Agdam had died (Barringer and Keller, 1988). There were no further clarifications about the circumstances of the death of any of them (Vasilevsky, 1988, Barringer and Keller, 1988). Malkasian argues that Henrik Poghosyan urged Katusev not to disclose the nationalities of the two, but the advice was disregarded (Malkasian, 1996: 52). Alexander Vasilevsky includes the comments of a brother of one of the victims who claimed that the Azerbaijani militia (equivalent to the police) had murdered his brother (1988). The acting prosecutor appointed from Moscow did admit the mistake of lack of information, but only after the news caused outrage in Baku and another tragedy in Sumgait. Igor Nolyain directly accused the Soviet

³⁶ This is an article from series dedicated to Nagorno-Karabakh called "Moscow's Karabakh Frontline", published by the Leningrad-based (currently Saint-Petersburg) magazine *Avrora* from 1988 to 1991, and available online at: <http://nashasreda.ru/karabaxskij-front-moskvy/> [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

authorities of mishandling the communication and argues that it was impossible that the words of an investigator from Moscow, whether true or false, could not have caused such large scale violence (1994: 542). In analysing the riots and violence in Sumgait he mostly focuses on the inability of the Soviet authorities to mobilise troops and stop pogroms that actually lasted four days (Nolyain, 1994: 543). Besides this, he argues that Gorbachev adopted the definition of a “protracted inter-ethnic conflict” to cover up the inadequate measures (Nolyain, 1994: 544, New York Times, 1990). By following the timeline of the February events, Nolyain accuses the Soviet propaganda of stirring up the confrontation while he provides extracts from alternative statements and newspapers (1994: 555-556). He criticizes the Soviet leadership for failing to differentiate between pluralism and national chauvinism that actually was the most important aspect in the discourse not only about Sumgait but other outbreaks in the Caucasus (Nolyain, 1994: 551).

Armenians worried about truth and justice in Sumgait, and Azerbaijanis wished to know the truth about the events in Armenia before Sumgait (Vasilevsky, 1988). Vasilevsky conducted some interviews shortly after the tragedy, with victims from both Armenian and Azeri sides. He travelled to the region weeks after the clashes. The victims tell stories of cruelty and ask why this happened, and how it was possible that certain groups set out to murder ethnic Armenians in Sumgait. They recount how their Azeri neighbours risked their own lives to save them (Vasilevsky, 1988). But before the tragedy in Sumgait unfolded, and during the first demonstration in Stepanakert on 14 February 1988, the executive committee of the Azeri Communist Party summoned a meeting where comrade Asadov (a Party functioneer) stated that “one hundred thousand Azerbaijanis are ready to invade

Karabakh and conduct massacres” (Vasilevsky, 1988). In other words, there were attempts at intimidation as well as the triggering of ethnic unrest. Sumgait is an example of both apathy and empathy, when the Armenian community in an Azerbaijani town was robbed and harassed.

Alexander Vasilevsky describes the background of the Sumgait tragedy: the complete inaction of the government to take charge of the crisis and calm down the nationalist sentiments. Soviet citizens had been always told that every guilty person would bear responsibility for any wrongdoing, but Vasilevsky argues that the “filtering” of information causes Chernobyls and Sumgaits, and the actual situation when it finally gets out to the public only exacerbates the situation (1988). The continued control of the information by means of secrecy and concealment had fatal results. It seemed that the government of the USSR suffered from an ingrained fear of a mistake or misjudgement. Within half an hour, a group of 40-50 people had transformed into a crowd of five thousand, shouting “Death to Armenians” (Vasilevsky, 1988, Masih and Krikorian, 1999: 7).

The same article contains examples told by the survivors of the massacre who fled to Yerevan. Rioters were asking for identity documents to ensure that no Armenian was overlooked, yet at the same time Azerbaijani neighbours and friends saved the lives of many Armenians during the attack (Vasilevsky, 1988). An Armenian who spoke fluent Azerbaijani saved himself and was lucky to escape (Vasilevsky, 1988). Narratives of other survivors are similar. The rioters invaded their homes, many Azeri neighbours rushed to save them. All of them did what they could to save lives as the invaders shouted, “they had to free Azerbaijan from Armenians” or “they came to drink the blood of Armenians” (Vasilevsky, 1988). One of the survivors,

Vitalik, a 15-year-old says, that there would had been more casualties if hundreds of Azerbaijanis had not risked their lives to help Armenians to escape the massacre (Vasilevsky, 1988).

Riots were organized along ethnic lines and Armenians were *othered* — labelled as enemies, thus deserving to be murdered. Armenians became the 'exception' (see Schmitt), and that cleared the way to killings. Crowds were mobilized to follow the order to annihilate their neighbours. Vasilevsky denounces the ethnic interpretation, stressing that it was a political decision that assigned an ethnic definition to a political and legal problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia (1988). Looking into previous discourses, one has to acknowledge the significance of speech acts that signified ethnicity. Vasilevsky was not alone in his assumptions. An Armenian dissident, Paruir A. Airikyan, had told the *New York Times* that recent riots over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh "had been wrongly portrayed as an ethnic conflict to avoid discrediting Mr. Gorbachev's program of political openness" (Uhlig, 1988). Airikyan insists that the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh jurisdiction was a political problem, "a question of democracy and human rights" (Uhlig, 1988). In his view, the Nagorno-Karabakh dilemma exposed the possibilities of democratic change within the Soviet Constitution, but the government's response, to reject the transition from one republic to another, had shown that the reform was not prioritizing democracy, but "strengthening totalitarianism" (Uhlig, 1988). Ethnicity was a good pretext for all parties, as the Moscow administration covered up governance failures, whereas for political groups in Armenia and Azerbaijan it was a political opportunity in the time of crisis to acquire power and authority. As Brubaker and Laitin argue this could be defined as "ethnicization of political violence" which is

triggered by a declining state (Weberian monopoly on violence) and a lack of organisation (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998: 424). Making further observations, they consider that “conflicts driven by struggles for power between challengers and incumbents are newly ethnicized, newly framed in ethnic terms” (1998: 425). Pointing to the confusion that is caused by the “ethnicization” of the conflict, it is instrumental to seek and identify and “analyse and explain the heterogeneous processes and mechanisms” that generate the branding of violence as “ethnic” (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998: 447). Elaborating on Brubaker’s and Laitin’s point, one could suggest that discourse framed the violence in an ethnic context. The emphasis in speeches and the interpretation of problems was ethnic, but this paradigm was constructed, and served specific political purposes. Sumgait was a turning point in the confrontation that made the normalisation process almost impossible, as Cheterian argues, because it opened the doors of history into the unknown that broke the old rules of the political game without defining new ones (2008: 98).

5.4. Between the past and the present

On 27 February 1988 the *Pravda* newspaper had published Gorbachev’s address to the Armenian and Azerbaijani people, which was titled “*Social Internationalism — Is the source of Our Power*” (TASS, 1988). Gorbachev acknowledged the existence of “unresolved problems” in the USSR, though he argued that mistrust and the incitement of divisions was going to hinder the process further (TASS, 1988). It was announced that the Party was intending to dedicate an entire plenum of the Central Committee to the issue of national relations within the USSR, but, in the meantime, Gorbachev urged the Armenians and Azerbaijanis to “strengthen the traditions of

friendship between the nations that were accumulated for years of the Soviet rule” and “demonstrate civil maturity” (TASS, 1988). Yet the letter did not help, as the situation deteriorated whilst the Soviet government had been busy considering how to summon the plenum.

An examination of the minutes of the special session dedicated to the crisis in Armenia and Azerbaijan demonstrates the approaches used by the Soviet government to resolve the issue. The minutes show Secretary Gorbachev’s priorities, and his perception of the conflict. Drawing on the conversations between the members of the Politburo (the executive committee of the Communist Party) one can observe how the Kremlin lost control over the situation (Gorbachev-Foundation, 1995: 21-30).³⁷ It is significant that Mikhail Gorbachev and Andrei Gromyko (former minister of foreign affairs of the USSR) evaluated the problem from Lenin’s perspective. Both of them referred to Lenin’s experience with national minorities as Lenin was a source of legitimacy of the decision for the Soviet leadership. Gorbachev mentioned during the session that he thought about Lenin’s approach to hard-core problems and decided to write a letter to the hostile parties, i.e. Armenians and Azerbaijanis, or broker and participate in a bilateral meeting of Armenian and Azeri representatives personally (Lenin used to employ this tactic: either write a letter or meet the parties).

³⁷ the full text of the minutes is published on the Armenian web-site <http://sumgait.info/sumgait/politburo-meeting-29-february-1988.htm> but the information provided in the thesis is verified in the publication of the Gorbachev Foundation as well as through other primary and secondary sources. [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

Gorbachev shared the conversation he had had earlier with Armenian nationalist activists Zori Balayan and Silva Kaputikian (see Rost, 1990: 21-22, Geukjian, 2012: 145).³⁸ Their conversation depicts the narrative that was built around the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh. Apparently, Kaputikian and Balayan insisted that the Kremlin transfer jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, telling Gorbachev that the decision to deny the plea would be interpreted as a hostile measure in Armenia (Sumgait.Info, 1988). Gorbachev's main demand was to stop the escalation of the conflict, and he argued that the decision was in the best common interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the USSR. Gorbachev asked Armenian nationalists to think about the tense situation in Azerbaijan, but they replied that it was not Azerbaijan that should be worried, but Armenia, because the Kremlin was on the "Azeri side" (Sumgait.Info, 1988). As the minutes show, Kaputikian and Balayan seemed rather indifferent about tensions in Baku and the entire political crisis.

Zori Balayan recalls his and Kaputikyan's conversation with Gorbachev and Yakovlev in an interview with Yuri Rost, when Gorbachev promised them that he would solve the problem, saying "you have my word", and he asked to dissolve the 700,000 crowd in the Theatre Square in Yerevan (in Rost, 1990: 21). Balayan quotes Gorbachev, who told them to "put out the fire without worrying about the windows", which they [Kaputikian and Balayan] understood as meaning they could say anything to the people, "but remember that we are Communists and are not going to beat about the bush" (in Rost, 1990: 21). When Balayan was addressing the crowd in

³⁸ Silva Kaputikian was a Soviet Armenian poet and writer, and a very active member of the nationalist movement in Armenia.

Yerevan, the Sumgait tragedy was unfolding near Baku, but Armenians did not know about it yet. The demonstration was eventually dissolved, though Muradian (addressing crowds in Russian) urged the people to return to the Square on 26 March (Rost, 1990: 22). In another interview for the Radio Liberty Balayan observes that Gorbachev was a “convinced democrat” who did not want to listen to any of their [Balayan and Kaputikyan] stories about “historic rights, self-determination, or the will of the people”, because as a politician he was interested in resolving the dispute in a way that might satisfy Armenians without offending Azerbaijanis (Balayan, 1990: 13). However, and as he notes, they [Balayan and Kaputikyan] could not offer any proposal that would meet Gorbachev’s criteria, because he wished “Armenia’s demands met for the sake of justice” (Balayan, 1990). One notices the importance of “justice” in the discourse again. He insists on “justice”, thus creating a domain of truth, and directing the way of thinking about the issue. Demanding “justice” allows Gorbachev to seek an “exception” from the previous order, i.e. the Soviet order before *Perestroika* (in Schmittian terms). Speaking of the conversation with Gorbachev, Balayan observes a “bizarre phrase” uttered by the Soviet leader: “but have you thought about the hundreds of thousands of Armenians in Azerbaijan?” (in 1990: 13). Balayan speculates that either Gorbachev foresaw the events in Sumgait and Baku, or somebody threatened him with such actions, or there was an attempt of intimidation, or else the most staggering assumption could be that Gorbachev was “calling for reprisals” (Balayan, 1990: 13). Interestingly, Balayan explains why both Kaputikyan and himself returned to Yerevan, and described the meeting “in rosy tones” — they “wanted so much to give the people hope” (Balayan, 1990: 13).

In the meantime, in Azerbaijan public opinion deemed that Armenia had the most support from Moscow as well as the international community (Swietochowski, 1995: 197). Azerbaijan felt dispossessed, as Gorbachev showed sympathy toward the Armenian position, despite ostensibly supporting the *status quo*, and other republics sided with Armenia as well as Andrei Sakharov, a Nobel Prize-winning Russian scholar and a dissident, “the man symbolising the best of Russia” (Swietochowski, 1995: 197). Indeed, Armenians had more support and were better prepared in terms of shaping international opinion than Azerbaijan. Yuri Rost, a journalist and a photographer, dedicated a monograph to the conflict, offering his insights and observations across the two republics. When pressure in Armenia was particularly high, the Azerbaijanis were putting their slogans together: “not an inch”, “don’t give an inch” and “we won’t give up a single square centimetre” (Rost, 1990: 17).

According to Gorbachev, he was clear about the immediate need to stop the escalation and that, in time to come, they (Armenian nationalists) would appreciate his moves to stop them, as the situation could become unmanageable (Gorbachev-Foundation, 1995: 22-27, Sumgait.Info, 1988). The content of the dialogue shows the degree of concern among the Politburo and the Soviet leadership. Kaputikian and Balayan asked Gorbachev to form a special commission to deal with the issue. They accused Gorbachev of openly supporting Azerbaijan’s interests as he signed the letter that denied Armenians jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh. Gorbachev did not see the point in any separate commission when the Politburo and the Secretary General himself was involved in problem solving (in the USSR special commissions

were common practice and usually they were established to tackle particular problems).

It was Balayan who came up with a key question asking Gorbachev after the discussion: “what are we going to tell the people?” (Sumgait.Info, 1988). In other words, they needed an answer for people in the streets of Yerevan. They had mobilised the entire country to support the cause, which they were ultimately unable to deliver and thus unable to secure their authority. To be more specific, they were worried that “the people” might demand answers. Balayan and Kaputikian went to Moscow to meet Gorbachev and needed political dividends to claim legitimacy back in Yerevan. Gorbachev answered that the people in Armenia had to acknowledge that the Soviet government did not discriminate against them and that there were no misunderstandings between them; further, that the Central Committee would continue to work on pressing Karabakh issues (see Balayan, 1990, Sumgait.Info, 1988). Another activist, Igor Muradian, one of the founding members of the Karabakh Committee, told the *New York Times* in a phone conversation that “we just never expected it to get this big”; according to the reporters, Muradian seemed to be overwhelmed by the scale of civil disobedience and mass murders that the initiative on Nagorno-Karabakh had caused (Barringer and Keller, 1988). In the interview he admits that new Soviet policies gave them a chance to exercise political activity that was previously “unthinkable” (Barringer and Keller, 1988). Notably, Muradian did not speak fluent Armenian, as he was born and raised in Baku and moved to Armenia when he was 26 (Balayan quoted in Rost, 1990: 11). He was a doctor of economics, who launched the campaign for Karabakh and organised meetings with Armenians in Moscow as well as wrote letters to the government on behalf of the Armenian nation

(Rost, 1990: 11). His point illustrates the fact that nationalists and intellectuals who were supposed to champion the freedom of expression and civil liberties they admired so much in the West, mismanaged this “unthinkable” political activity. “Unthinkable” is an utterance that demonstrates how the enunciator attempts to control the discourse, and transmute the parts that are unfavourable for his position (see ch.3). Apart from Balayan and Kaputikian, there were two other delegations visiting Moscow, that presented Armenian demands, and the trip was seen as a huge success for Armenia. Talking to the *New York Times*, Mofses Gargisyan, editor of a dissident magazine in Yerevan, admitted that back in Armenia they [the delegates] “were celebrating their victory, as they really thought they had won” (Barringer and Keller, 1988).

Gorbachev admitted, in his conversation with the Politburo, that both Armenian representatives were aspiring to improve their reputation by meeting him. It is his opinion that they wished to look influential because of their audience with Mikhail Gorbachev (see Rost, 1990, Sumgait.Info, 1988). Kaputikian and Balayan were Communists too, and Gorbachev viewed them as very prominent members of the Armenian intelligentsia. The Soviet leader also mentioned the recording of the multi-thousand gathering in Yerevan, which assembled Armenians to express their protest.

According to Gorbachev, Armenians were angry that the Kremlin called them “extremists” and abettors (Sumgait.Info, 1988). Yet Gorbachev clarified that the Central Committee implied that some people were influenced by criminals both in Armenia and Azerbaijan (Sumgait.Info, 1988). The Soviet government did differentiate between the people and the abettors. This pattern is significant and

demonstrates the ad-hoc reaction to the crisis. The protests in Yerevan were massive and the Politburo was concerned about tens of thousands of people walking out of their jobs and wandering the streets. As other members reported, the Armenians were getting calmer and returned to their jobs. However, there were reports of Armenians leaving Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijanis fleeing Armenia. The tensions increased fear among the population of both republics. In the meantime Azerbaijanis accused the Kremlin of ignoring 200,000 Azerbaijanis deported from Armenia and being concerned with the interruption in the supply of goods instead (Swietochowski, 1995: 198).

This crisis is an example of how the political issue of status transformed communities into enemies in a matter of days. The people lived in a Soviet republic and knew little about politics, as they were ruled from Moscow. This is partially the reason that Armenian nationalists sought Gorbachev's audience. It was usual for the local authorities not to make important decisions without consulting the Kremlin as the Central Committee had the reputation of an almighty club of leaders of the Communist Party. It was a dominant polity that possessed the right to make decisions when the subordinate unit did not have that right (Lake, 1996: 7). The hierarchy was very inflexible for the titular units, but it had huge flaws in the structure that made it impossible to tackle the crisis created by the nationalistic discourse and economic stagnation. Thus, the USSR was unable to manage the dispute between two union republics. Constitutionally, there was the possibility of changing the borders of the republics with consent from Moscow; however, the Kremlin was not ready to amend the borders because the precedent was too risky and dangerous. The minutes show that the Soviet government was aware that ethnic

discourse and its securitization was a threat for the USSR. At the same time, it seems they knew that radicalisation was being conducted by particular individuals but they were incapable of dissuading them from the actions and statements they made.

Gorbachev expressed his astonishment about this lack of interaction and communication. It could be assumed that on the one hand Gorbachev was committed to sharing power and allocating more responsibility to local intelligentsia and governments, although the Soviet people and intelligentsia were not ready to digest the freedom of expression and thought. Subsequently, Glasnost had a limited effect in terms of improving democratic credentials across the USSR. It resulted in a decline of central power, and the race for power in the republics increased dramatically (Sharlet, 1992: 11).

Gorbachev seemed to have been worried about anti-Soviet sentiments. The minutes do not show whether the leadership acknowledged the critical situation the USSR was going through. *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* were about more freedom and pluralism, but they were obliged to think about the consequences of the new policies. There is one important phrase voiced by Gorbachev: “there are no contacts (between leaders of the republics), do you understand! And this happens in a time when people are given the floor to speak” (Sumgait.Info, 1988). The Soviet leader acknowledged the need for communication, as he insisted that officials have to speak to public — he added that the authorities have to oversee the process along with the intelligentsia (Sumgait.Info, 1988). Yet although he thought that the people could

communicate new ideas to wider audiences, they were simply not ready for the mission.³⁹

Gorbachev tried to involve the intelligentsia in the process of reforming the state and society. However, the intelligentsia was not ready to become a *via media* (Wendt), a channel of communication capable of overseeing the new pluralist society. On the contrary, they became the agency that supported further separation. The most prominent writers, actors or other representatives of Soviet intelligentsia, who were loyal to the Communist Party and were often members of the organisation, became hard-headed nationalists. They created the discourse of national values, traditions, history and future security that became an instrumental factor in the escalation of conflicts. They looked immature and unprepared to lead a society into the new world order. They became opportunists rather than enlightened (epistemic) communities prepared for a change. In a certain way, the public was much more liberal than these groups, but their attitude and positioning gained nationalistic legitimacy. They appeared to be freedom fighters — truth seekers epitomising justice in an *unjust* Soviet state. The intelligentsia now symbolized historic justice, national traditions and freedom, but interpretation and translation of these ideas shaped the discourse and content of the conflict. It is hard to find a firm rationale for their behaviour, but one could claim that nationalism was destroying intellectuality as the intelligentsia was adhering to the discursive strategies that elevated the nation's legitimacy into a teleological setting (Suny and Kennedy, 1999: 5). They emphasized the usable past, and defined the language through which it had

³⁹ There was a Friday late night TV show "Vzglayd" (Sight) broadcast by the major channel of the USSR, which was perhaps the best attempt to explain what *Perestroika* was about, but one programme was unable to change the minds of entire country.

to be expressed; then they turned nationalist ideas into a social force (Hroch, 1993: 9-10). A plethora of issues and interests coincided. For example, in Armenia Balayan and Kaputikian, as well as other writers or scholars, constantly referred to the opportunity of the reunification of ancient Armenian lands, and it was defined as historic justice (see Libaridian, 1988).

Gorbachev emphasized one detail of the discourse between Armenia and Azerbaijan: an Azeri composer defines Nagorno-Karabakh as “my”, whereas Armenians say “ours” (Sumgait.Info, 1988). These pronouns became significant: “my” showed that Azerbaijanis were not ready to compromise, and Armenians had cultural and historical bond to the place so it was “our”, which was a symbol of Armenianess, the pronouns had a symbolic power (see Bourdieu, ch. 3), an intended meaning that was dividing the two people. For Gorbachev, the idea of Armenian autonomy in Azerbaijan was an oxymoron, but he argued that if they could secure “true autonomy”⁴⁰ with multiple opportunities, then it might work (Sumgait.Info, 1988). To be more specific, Gorbachev thought that Armenians were in fact disadvantaged in political terms, but that if Nagorno-Karabakh were to become autonomous, the problem could be solved. However, Abkhazia, for example, was an autonomous republic within Georgia, but it did not prevent the conflict from escalating. Simply changing the nomenclature in a crumbling system was doing too little, too late.

Gorbachev and other members of the Politburo agreed to address the issues of ethnicities and asked Julian Bromley (head of the Institute of Ethnography, a main state think tank on nationalism in the USSR) to research the issue, noting that these

⁴⁰ Gorbachev meant real devolution of power, not the rights written on paper

types of issues had never been addressed before (Sumgait.Info, 1988). Gorbachev thought to calm the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and then continue to work on ethnicity problems.

Apparently, these communication issues were not addressed in the principles of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. However, Gorbachev was aware of the problem, though the minutes reveal that his Politburo colleagues (Ligachev and Gromyko) did not comprehend the challenge (Sumgait.Info, 1988). The Soviet government did not think about the underlying layers that could impede reform. This again proves that they lacked a real strategy that might deliver *glasnost* to its recipients — the public. The pattern that is observable in the conflicts in the South Caucasus demonstrates a chain of events that intertwined with one another and caused armed confrontations. The Soviet government did not have a strategy of change, and they could not identify rational and balanced channel of communication, and the local actors found opportunities within the flaws of the government and, together with the intelligentsia, brought the republics to the brink.

The intelligentsia was in essence a Soviet version of the “epistemic community” but it was not ready for the mission, and in fact lacked the necessary epistemic resources (see ch. 1). Hence, when the Politburo members were looking for solutions and Gorbachev emphasized the role of the intelligentsia in peace-building, they demonstrated an inability to use normative instruments and to re-direct the transformation to different avenues. For example, Elena Bonner,⁴¹ Andrei

⁴¹ She was the daughter of the founder of the Armenian Communist Party, Georgy Alikhanov

Sakharov's wife and a human rights activist, wrote in the preface of the Caroline Cox and John Eibner report that:

"I believe that basically the present tragedy is caused not by the specific religious or cultural features of the two peoples, but by insistence on the priority of the principle of territorial integrity, which is the right of a state, over the principle of national self-determination, which is a part of human rights." (in Cox and Eibner, 1993: 3)

Bonner compares the siege to the Leningrad occupation: "Today Armenia is reminiscent of Leningrad under siege from Hitler's army during the Second World War" (in Cox and Eibner, 1993: 4). Her stance and language act as a very powerful performative that was able to affect international opinion on the conflict, and not least to mobilise more Armenians against Azerbaijan. She was a public figure who was listened to both in and outside the USSR. In this turbulent period, every word she articulated had a magnifying effect. As argued in the second chapter of this thesis, in crisis situations words change their meanings, particularly when they are turned into a social force of nationalism. Her comparison of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to the Nazi occupation did not help dialogue and reconciliation. She defines the blockade of Armenia as a "new form of racism" because they suffered for the simple reason of being Armenian (in 1993: 4) Bonner's opening remarks in the report were a radical appeal to the international community to "save" Armenia (in 1993: 5). One can see the continuation of mobilising the fear for existence, as described by Dudwick earlier in this chapter. Her words are speech acts that appeal to the justificatory strategy of reproduction of Armenian identity *vis-a-vis* the threat. Granted, she also admits that Armenia does not need weaponry or soldiers, but

rather, the robust diplomatic efforts of Western governments — but this is tucked away in the second part of her report.

Returning to the Politburo discussion, Gorbachev and his aides talked about the crisis in Sumgait and worried about the consequences if Armenians were to obtain that information (Sumgait.Info, 1988). In the 1980s, information flows were slow, and mostly controlled by the state-owned and state-controlled news agency (ITAR-TASS). Perhaps the government was uncertain as how to manage information about the tragedy. They were convinced that the amount and content of information should be controlled by the Politburo. For example, Gorbachev told the Interior Minister to ensure that criminal charges were lodged against the perpetrators in Sumgait (Sumgait.Info, 1988). One could assume that without his confirmation the authorities did not intend to punish those responsible for the massacre. The state system was paralyzed, as there was lack of efficient delegation of power. Another member of the council, Alexander Yakovlev, stated: “we need to announce immediately, about the events in Sumgait, that criminal charges are brought against criminals and they are arrested. We need this to cool down the passions. The Sumgait newspaper has to declare this quickly and clearly” (Sumgait.Info, 1988). It has to be noted that the Politburo held a monopoly over information policy in the USSR (Dzirkals, 1982: vi), and that the newspapers should have obeyed any directive from the top.

Gorbachev asked the ministers to involve “working-class” people and not to threaten them with the army (Sumgait.Info, 1988). The underlying message from Gorbachev is to refrain from the use of force (see Chernyaev 2000). Many across the former USSR think that the tragedy in Sumgait could have been avoided if the Soviet

government had used force immediately. In private talks, many experts and professionals who followed the events felt that the government had failed and allowed Azerbaijanis to murder Armenians (Khaindrava, 2013). It is thought (by the majority of Georgian experts) that this was a strategy to enhance enmity among the neighbouring countries.

The meeting concluded that the officials had to use all possible tools to prevent further escalation, and mobilize local communities, and demonstrate that the situation was under control. Those attending the meeting discussed the TV reports aired in Armenia, and suggested that a demonstration of “calmness” could avert the worst-case scenarios (Gorbachev-Foundation, 1995, Sumgait.Info, 1988).

It could be argued that the declaration sent to the Kremlin about the transfer of the jurisdiction was the starting point of the escalation of violence, but the crisis and conflict was a multi-layered friction that had accumulated during the Soviet regime, primarily as a result of the large-scale epistemic violence against the communities in the units of the USSR. Accordingly, to use the constructivist idea of a mutually constituted environment, the Soviet government isolated itself in a shell of inefficiency and incapacity. They became trapped inside the illusory world that they had constructed behind the Iron Curtain (see Kedourie in ch. 4). By introducing epistemic violence, they produced outcomes (and unintended consequence) of which they were unaware and unable to control. They ended up as mere fire fighters in the dissolving and evaporating state and system. In a different setting, *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* could have been effective tools of transformation, albeit if there had been a phase-by-phase plan of implementation and a project of large-scale devolution. The USSR did not have either of these. Gorbachev, the champion of

change, wished to bring greater freedom than before but lacked the instruments and means of implementation of the idea of *Perestroika*. The conflicts that escalated in the Soviet space were caused by the interaction of several variables, and a hostile discourse that interpreted the situation in a particular framework that was convenient for the local political actors. The comrades in Moscow in fact lacked the capacity to control, and they acted in order to give the appearance of being in charge, while the local politicians chose the role of freedom fighters in their quest to attain power. At the same time, political entrepreneurs were using the government's weakness and promoting their agendas.

For example, there were some incidents in the Crimea, which was the part of the Ukrainian SSR, regarding the status of Tatars residing there. Crimean Tatars appealed to the Kremlin and demanded the restoration of the Autonomous republic, but the Communist administration rejected the plea and accused the Tatar activists of disregarding the "present administrative-territorial division" of the USSR that was granting opportunities to "accomplish the tasks of economic and social development of all ethnic groups in the country" (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 301). Similarly to Armenians, Tatars were unhappy with the decision and intended to demonstrate further in Tashkent, but the leaderships of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan⁴² managed to "defuse" the problem and a number of agreements were achieved (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 301). This example shows that there were the opportunities to settle the disagreements. However, in the South Caucasus the local discourse

⁴² Tatars were exiled to Central Asia in the Soviet period and most of them lived in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

combined with the incapacity of the central government produced disastrous policy outcomes.

5.5. Armenian discourse. Did Armenia Triumph?

This change brought new words into public discourse, such as “justice” and “historic lands”, that amended previously accepted meanings and many people did not know their correct interpretation. In Yerevan, emerging ambitious political actors launched the Nagorno-Karabakh campaign grabbing attention and legitimacy for their activities. Tradition, history, justice and national pride were brought together to demonstrate the values of Armenia and gain nationwide support. The acting Communist administration was paralyzed and depended largely on Kremlin directives. Meanwhile, new political groups organized their speeches and manifestos along ethnic lines, and the majority of the intelligentsia aligned with them.

However, this section is about discourse in Armenia, and how words and speeches shaped enmity. Talks of the nation, tradition, justice, “sacred” history — all those words that transformed what was once a community into a hostile group. The most pressing questions were “who the nation is?”, and “who is the subject to benefit from historic justice and which *tradition* is worth more than human life?”. The next sections will address the events and speech acts that further escalated the crisis.

5.5.1. Words as weapons

In November 1987, one of the close aides to Gorbachev, Abel Aganbegyan (an Armenian), in an interview to a French newspaper *L'Humanite*, stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) would soon fall under the jurisdiction of Armenia (in Cornell, 1999: 13). He was and remains a prominent economist, and is considered to be the godfather of the Soviet economic reforms, and the generation of young Russian reformers of the 1990s. He was a man whose opinion, let alone statements, could not be ignored. Many have accused him of fuelling mass rallies in Armenia as a result of his remarks in Paris (Smith, 1988). Quoted in *The Karabagh Files*, he emphasized the economic aspects of the issue and noted that from an economic point of view, Karabakh is much closer to Armenia and that he had written a memo to the government (in Libaridian, 1988: 71, Imranli-Lowe, 2015: 155). By emphasizing closeness, he meant that the majority in the autonomous region were Armenians. Yet, later in an interview to the *New York Times* he denied the claims, stating that he only talked about the commission that examined the possibility of changing jurisdiction of the NKAO, nothing more (Smith, 1988).

Many political actors and public across Armenia believed in the statement made by Gorbachev's economic advisor, an ethnic Armenian. It was believed that he discussed the issue with Gorbachev himself, that the Soviet leader considered the option to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. The Politburo minutes reveal Gorbachev's position on the issue: that "there is a dialectic (contradiction)" in this autonomy, though at the same time he was not prepared either here, nor in the Soviet system overall, to reconsider and change internal borders within the Union (Cornell, 1999: 14, Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 285, Gorbachev, 1995). Gorbachev

talked about enhanced autonomy within Azerbaijan, which would make Nagorno-Karabakh a republic, not an oblast. Yet according to Gorbachev the reason the Soviet regime at the time ignored the idea was because of the Armenian nationalists who used Karabakh to boost the national movement and seize power (in Cornell, 1999: 14, 1990, Gorbachev, 1995: 336-37). The then-Soviet leader argues in his memoirs that the “national feelings” became objects of “merciless exploitation” and that mistakes made by the Azerbaijani government, which did not “treat the Karabakh population in the spirit of the traditions of Lenin” had laid a bomb underneath Perestroika (Gorbachev, 1995: 336). It is clear that Gorbachev saw the trends of securitization of ethnicity, he just did not use this word to define the process. He also knew that the government should “never be blackmailed into this” (1995: 336), though high tensions played into the hands of nationalists.

Armenian intellectuals like Zori Balayan began to talk about the legal dispute openly. They thought *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* were the “weapons” that gave advantage to Armenia and her bid to unify (Libaridian, 1988: 71). Balayan referred to Stalin’s policies that *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* had to address (Libaridian, 1988: 71). Insisting that it was very difficult to visualize a future Armenia without Karabakh, he argued that “the land of our historic fatherland continues to remain occupied and we are gathered in a small place and we cannot continue like this” (Libaridian, 1988: 72). He depicted patriotism as a “struggle in the real meaning of the word” (Libaridian, 1988: 72). It is worth noting that “patriotism” has acquired a very negative connotation in all three republics, as it became a symbol of hatred rather than love. Balayan explains his vision of the word: “we should not equate patriotism with nationalism, where one is disdainful of others and places oneself above others...

patriotism, first of all it is a struggle in the name of the fatherland” (Libaridian, 1988: 72). Yet the “struggle” was against the other, the people who were securitized and depicted as threats. Armenia’s identity was focused on Karabakh, and legally it was part of Azerbaijan. To refer back to Morgenthau, the “lust for power” transformed “love for country into imperialism” (see chapter 1).

In the same interview, Balayan put forward arguments against Azerbaijan. He states that Armenians (note that he speaks in the name of the nation) reject the recognition of the word “Azerbaijan” (Libaridian, 1988: 76). Armenians acknowledge “Georgia, Russia, Armenia, but not Azerbaijan” (Libaridian, 1988: 76). By making such statements he *acts* against Azerbaijani people who are now non-existent in Armenia’s reality. Balayan returns to the 1920s and argues that Azerbaijan was a constructed name given to Caucasian Tatars by Lenin (Libaridian, 1988: 76). In the same conversation Balayan blames Stalin for the status of Nakhichevan, he states that the resources of Nagorno-Karabakh and its fertile soil can feed Armenia and guarantee Armenia’s existence for the “next hundred years” (Libaridian, 1988: 76). Balayan is openly declaring anti-Turkish sentiments through propagating a Turkish conspiracy theory against the Russian Empire (Libaridian, 1988: 77). He accuses “Djugashvili, that is Stalin” (emphasizing his Georgian origin) of a pro-Turkish decision when he gave the jurisdiction over Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan (Libaridian, 1988: 77). Balayan argues that, despite strenuous efforts, the Turks failed to achieve their goals, as Azerbaijan was a Soviet Socialist Republic, and it was “ours, part of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics” (Libaridian, 1988: 77). Almost every word pronounced by Balayan was a performative that aimed to change the origin and cultural belonging and identity of Azerbaijan. It serves the aim of the dehumanisation of Azerbaijanis

and legitimizes enmity. One could argue that he wished to create a new “regime of truth” where Azerbaijan is an exception from Georgia or Russia. In other words, for Armenians and Azerbaijanis are not the same people as e.g., the Georgians.

Zory Balayan published a column for the *Golos Armenii*,⁴³ a political newspaper in 2013, which marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Karabakh Movement and is a brief review of his memories of 1988. Balayan describes his efforts and his work to start the movement and to bring Karabakh back to Armenia. But he remains silent about the price that Armenians had to pay for the Movement. The letter is full of historic references, national pride and explanations for the future generations to fight for justice. Balayan professes himself proud to be among the initiators of the Karabakh Committee who published that letter in the newspaper *Soviet Karabakh* (Sovetskii Karabakh) that asked the Kremlin to transfer jurisdiction to Yerevan. He proudly remembers the process of collecting the signatures of about eighty thousand residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, which in his column now appeared as *Artsakh*,⁴⁴ and offers a historic review of almost all attempts during the Soviet rule to join Armenia. Despite the tragedies and the deaths of thousands of people, the nationalists still considered their cause to be rightful. Their discourse continued to dominate the securitization of Azerbaijanis by reminding the public about the letter to the Kremlin, which cost many lives, and the political and the economic isolation of Armenia.

⁴³ Balayan, Z. 2013. 20-oe Fevralya 1988 goda. Ka keto bilo? Erkramas, Available at: <http://www.yerkramas.org/ru/article/52469/zorij-balayan-20-fevralya-1988--kak-eto-bylo> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

⁴⁴ Artsakh is the Armenian name of Nagorno-Karabakh

Interviews and letters in *The Karabagh File* demonstrate the rising nationalist discourse across Armenia. Prominent public figures and historians spoke up about Armenian lands under the control of Azerbaijan and Turkey that they thought had to be returned to Armenia (Libaridian, 1988: 73). It is worth pointing out that historians were the most significant speakers in all three republics. A historic narrative based on myths became a currency for the establishment of new states in the South Caucasus. The historian and journalist Sergey Mikoyan⁴⁵ talked about the new opportunities that *Perestroika* gave to Armenia; he was sure that a clear possibility existed allowing Armenians to take back control of Karabakh and Nakhichevan. He quoted Benjamin Disraeli and argued that politics is “the art of [the] possible”, hence Armenians were on the right track (Libaridian, 1988: 74). Such statements had significant locutionary effect in the restricted reality of the USSR. Historians in general did not consider the legal aspects that accompanied the issues. Mikoyan says it was “realistic” to return the lands — not only Karabakh but also Nakhichevan (Libaridian, 1988: 74). He appealed to the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh to be “strong and very decisive” otherwise they in Moscow cannot do anything (Libaridian, 1988: 74). In the interview he also mentions the Turkish territories that Armenians consider to be Armenian, Mikoyan said that change was possible and “we will never forget or forgive” (in Libaridian, 1988: 74). Stating several times that “it was possible to return Karabakh” Mikoyan did boost nationalistic sentiments. His background and influence were strengthening his assertions. Armenians in Yerevan as well as worldwide listened to and read carefully his opinions, and they thought he was right and that it was possible to redraw the Soviet internal borders in the age of

⁴⁵ Anastas Mikoyan’s son, who was Stalin’s friend and a close ally

Perestroika (see Papazian, 2001: 67). Mikoyan admits that, thanks to Glasnost, he was able to write and appeal to wider audiences: “I can make my opinion known to wider circles of people” (Libaridian, 1988: 74). It is apparent that he knew the power of every word and idea he subscribed to.

“I wrote an article explaining that I could not understand why one autonomous region [Karabagh], one ethnic group [Armenian] was included in the republic of another ethnic group [Azerbaijan SSR]. So, I expressed my opinion in the press that this was a mistake of the period of the 1920s and that it was time to rectify it. So I did it in the press. I do not have other opportunities or channels” (Mikoyan in Libaridian, 1988: 74).

Mikoyan also mentions “Turkey” as part of the problem. One can see a full-scale securitization of artefacts, emotions, and history. In other words, the Armenian nation has to follow the goal and not only request Karabakh and Nakhichevan but must also remember the territories in Turkey. This emphasizes Armenian identity, as a nation that has to return the old glory, the discourse about “Greater Armenia”.

Another prominent member of the Karabakh movement was Silva Kaputikyan, who met Gorbachev along with Zory Balayan. This is how she describes the argument over the lands between Armenia and Azerbaijan:

“Bitterly we paid for this maturity, bitter was the price for crushing our great trust, a crushing which reminds us of 9 January 1905. We, first the people of Karabakh, then the people of Armenia, marched to the winter palace, to the Lenin square in Stepanakert, and to the theatre square in Yerevan, convinced that the central power would understand us. We marched with words of trust in the land of socialism, in the Russian people, in Perestroika, with portraits of the secretary general of the

party, M.S. Gorbachev. But against us fire was opened. The fire was the unjust solution of the Politburo and the Supreme Soviet, lies created with the help of mass information, a blackening propaganda which witnessed the badly concealed benevolence of the Azerbaijan side. The fire was Sumgait” (Kaputikyan in Cornell, 1999: 3).

Kaputikyan suggests that Armenians were prominent and active during the October Revolution, but believes the trust they invested in the Russian people backfired when they were treated “unjustly” in regard to the Karabakh issue. Instead of loyalty they got “fire”, and that fire was Sumgait. In her address to the crowd in the Theatre Square she said that “Armenians have triumphed”, but Gorbachev did not promise anything to the Armenian representatives — instead, the only demand was to calm the situation (in Cornell, 1999: 16). Yet the word “triumphed” had significant repercussions, because the people thought that their demands had been met. There were more than a half a million protesters in the streets of Yerevan when Balayan added that "Mikhail Sergeyevich understands" (Barringer and Keller, 1988). Later, Kaputikyan changed her wording, insisting that she meant that it was Armenia’s moral triumph, as Armenians were used to being inspired by defeats (in Cornell, 1999: 16). This was an example of a communication that assigned a particular content to the words and to a certain extent had amended the truth by abstracting from the total social context; they repeated Gorbachev’s words but in slightly amended context (see Buzan et al ch. 3). Here one has to address the distal context of securitization as well, as when there is such an emphasis put on history and historic victimhood, the local meaning of the speech acts has to be taken into the consideration. Victimisation was used by Gamsakhurdia too. Putting emphasis on the negative past “establishes space for a specific kind of politics”, as it clears ground for a “neutral or

indisputable” pitch (Jeffery and Candea, 2006: 289). Speaking the victimhood is a performative that establishes its own reality (2006: 290). It helps enunciators to make their speech act successful, notwithstanding whether it is true or false. Performatives quoted from her speech (“Bitterly we paid for this maturity, bitter was the price for crushing our great trust...”) show the distal context of a speech act, when Armenia is depicted as a suffering nation, which has to return to the glory of the past.

Additionally, writing for the *Washington Post*, Kaputikyan used radical language to exemplify the injustice and suffering of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh (1988). She argues that, if Armenian people had ignored the pleas of Nagorno-Karabakh, it would have been “a complete cowardice and shameful betrayal” on the part of Armenia (Kaputikyan, 1988). She talks about reactions to the decision of the Supreme Soviet that denied the redrawing of the Soviet borders, when a young woman from Yerevan, an art historian, shouted: “If that's how it is, then I, too, will find some weapons. I, too, will learn how to cut up children. Apparently they give more attention to murderers than to us” (Kaputikyan, 1988). Another person replied that “we see that here [Soviet Union] they want to destroy us as a nation” (Kaputikyan, 1988). After condemning Gorbachev and Perestroika, the closing lines are aimed at mobilisation of national pride: “we will call upon our millennial, thousand-year-old inexhaustible spiritual potential and we will go on living” (Kaputikyan, 1988). These lines are illustrative of the common practice among the nationalists in Georgia too. She mentions “spiritual potential” in an attempt to deploy the “debris” of the past for the purpose of the present (see Hertzfield) similar to Gamsakhurdia’s references to the “holy blood” and souls of thousands of martyrs to support the national cause against the Soviet Empire (see the next chapter). Here

we see how ethnic entrepreneurs construct and use symbolic capital, while simultaneously generating a capacity to manage identities and beliefs (see Bigo ch. 3).

The historian Bagrat Ulubanian addressed the crowds in Yerevan in February 1988. He referred to the “misfortunes throughout the history” of Armenia and that, in an era of democratization, justice would triumph (Libaridian, 1988: 92). “The Armenian people finally woke up from its delightful slumber”, pronounced Levon Ter-Petrosian⁴⁶ in the Parliament of Armenia (Dudwick, 1993: 261). The use of metaphors pointing to the awakening of nations and rediscovery of the old glory expressed the trajectory of post-Soviet nationalism. Ter-Petrosian’s address was quoted from *The Wounds of Armenia*, a historic novel by Khachatour Abovian which says: “wake up... from your death-inviting slumber of ignorance, remember your past glory, mourn your present state of wretchedness and heed the example of other enlightened nations” (Libaridian, 1983: 82). One could see the references to unfortunate history and calls for justice. As was already mentioned earlier, intellectuals like Ulubanian had the authority and people listened to his ideas carefully.

Andrei Sakharov, the prominent Soviet academic, wrote a letter to Gorbachev urging him to listen to the Armenian people and restore the justice violated in 1923 (Sakharov, 1988: 131). Sakharov’s voice was a big support to the Armenian cause, and his words and views were carefully listened to in the West as well. A man who developed thermonuclear weapons for the USSR, and later became a civil rights activist and a dissident, was too important to ignore. His letter sums up the legal-

⁴⁶ He was the first president of Armenia

political story of the Karabakh status (Sakharov, 1988: 131-132). Using Perestroika as the main leitmotiv for the future of the USSR, Sakharov asks Gorbachev to heed the voices of Karabakh's Armenians, and support a "constitutional" solution of the issue (1988: 132). Sakharov notes that the maneuverers halted the constitutional and "normal" process, arguments directed mainly towards Armenians (1988: 132). Sakharov argues that the press coverage of the events was inadequate, because they denounced the legal demands of the Armenian people as a demonstration of extremism (1988: 131). He refers to the tragic days in Baku in February, reminding him of the 1915 (genocide), as he expresses the opinion that the entire dispute might have been provoked and planned by an "anti-Perestroika mafia" (131). According to him, the idea of Perestroika had been challenged and the USSR government had to find a way to resolve the issue "democratically and constitutionally" (Sakharov, 1988: 132). Finally, he appealed to Gorbachev not to delay the decision and to bring justice to the people (Sakharov, 1988: 132). He stressed the importance of perestroika, as saving the ideals of the reform agenda was possible only if Gorbachev demonstrated the will to follow the constitution. Sakharov's voice was a big support for Armenia's position both inside and outside the USSR (see Swietochowski, 1995).

5.6. Azerbaijan's Discourse

In Armenia, the issue over Nagorno-Karabakh launched the independence movement, and, later on, brought the group to power – Levon Ter-Petrosyan was one of the prominent leaders of the Committee. At the same time, in Azerbaijan, the Armenian initiative paved the way for nationalists to solidify their popularity.

Karabakh — a place, a word and a symbol — helped to mobilise the massive public support that was necessary to gain power in the post-Soviet state.

After this, the Azerbaijani government apparently panicked due to the Armenian demands, and decided to take action. The central administration from Moscow was calling on the parties to keep calm and negotiate within the Soviet legislature, but the Baku authorities responded violently to the problem. The then leader of Azerbaijan's Communist Party Aiaz Mutalibov was hostile to Armenian demands, declaring that particular individuals [Karabakh Committee] demanded secession from the country (Libaridian, 1988: 99). Azerbaijan's Communist government declared that Nagorno-Karabakh was one of the best performing regions of the republic (Libaridian, 1988: 99). Hence, despite its Armenian majority, Azerbaijan was considered to be very important because of its industrial output (Libaridian, 1988: 99). Mutalibov was sure that if he had Gorbachev's support in "cleansing" Nagorno-Karabakh, and arresting those individuals (the Karabakh Committee) who had triggered the independence talks, the problem would be solved; but it was only twenty-one years later that he revealed, to a *Radio Liberty* journalist, that he had indeed sought help from Gorbachev (Mutalibov, 2013).

Azerbaijan in the time of Perestroika was intellectually divided. There was a gulf between the Baku-based Russian-speaking intellectuals and the rest of the country. They were detested by the radical nationalists Etibar Mamedov and Neimet Panakhov, who were not interested in Perestroika (De Waal, 2003: 83). Such disagreement resulted in a continuing power struggle and made the Karabakh problem the single biggest mobilising force in Armenia and Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2003: 83, Steele, 1988). Up until 1988, Nagorno-Karabakh was not part of Azerbaijani

politics, let alone on the national agenda: perhaps that was the reason that Azerbaijan's leadership did not possess sufficient information to articulate clearly their responses to Armenia's demands (Cheterian, 2008: 95-97). An official from Moscow admitted that he had not encountered a single Armenian or Azeri who was able to suggest a compromise on the issue, (De Waal, 2003: 83).

Deteriorating relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan caused a mass exodus of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in November 1988. The protesters filled the former Lenin Square, reaching half a million in size during the daytime (De Waal, 2003: 83). Nemat Panakhov and Etibar Mamedov were the most radical and powerful anti-Armenian speakers: they claimed that Armenians were planning to build a guesthouse for workers of the Yerevan aluminium factory in the woods of Nagorno-Karabakh, but De Waal notes that the story was a subject of mass manipulation, as some believed that an actual factory was planned on the site (De Waal, 2003: 83). The mass protests were dissolved by force after eighteen days, and Pakhanov was arrested (De Waal, 2003: 83, Steele, 1988). The *Guardian* also reported that foreign media were banned from the city and Soviet press accounts were censored but Panakhov faced "charges of defying the state of emergency by instigating public disorder and inciting ethnic hatred against Armenians" (Steele, 1988). Nemat Panakhov was a twenty-six-year-old lathe operator from the Lieutenant Schmidt Factory, who was called the "Son of the People", as he had been able to articulate the concerns of the people demonstrating in the Lenin Square in Baku since November 1988 (Fuller, 1989: 4). He joined the demonstration from its inception (17 November), and had three main demands shared by the majority of demonstrators: the creation of an autonomous formation in Armenia, similar to

Nagorno-Karabakh, for all Azerbaijanis living there; the transfer of trials of Azerbaijanis accused of Sumgait massacres from Moscow back to Baku; and asked for provision for the Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia to return safely back home (Fuller, 1989: 4). Panakhov did not think that his demands were anti-Armenian or anti-Soviet or that asking Armenian people to alight from buses was not threatening any reprisals; rather he insisted they were in line with democracy and glasnost (Fuller, 1989: 4). When asked about demonstrators with Islamic symbols, he called them “marginal” (Fuller, 1989).

In December Panakhov was arrested and charged with “violating the public order and inciting ethnic discord” (Fuller, 1989: 5), and he was described by the local press as a demagogue and political illiterate who engaged in distortions concerning the nationalities policy and even was thought to plot against the leadership and secession from the USSR (Fuller, 1989: 5). Fuller reports suggest that it was not clear if Panakhov was used by different forces e.g. Geidar Aliev, but it was important that thousands of his countrymen shared the grievances articulated by him (1989: 5).

De Waal notes that the governmental crackdown on opposition stirred up intrigues and suspicions of treachery as most of the Soviet opposition groups were prone to the danger of being invaded by provocateurs or agents of KGB (De Waal, 2003: 84).⁴⁷ The KGB involvement was and remains an important variable in the exploration of the rallies and protests. There were dozens of political actors who claimed they faced mostly “unsuccessful” attempts of infiltration (De Waal, 2003: 84, see Geukjian, 2012: 149). Yet infiltration was a significant part of the discourse about

⁴⁷ This was a common problem in Georgia, Armenia and the Baltic republics. Provocateurs and destabilising agents were proclaimed enemies of freedom fighters.

national interests, freedom and enemies. Emerging political actors were closely monitored by the KGB and many declassified documents revealed the trend (see Bakatin's interview in Chervonnaya, 1994). Igor Nolyain claims that events in Sumgait were carefully organized and managed by the KGB, which had a double aim: first to calm Armenians while shedding blood, and to show that Azerbaijanis are moved by "ethnic hatred" rather than KGB manipulated provocateurs (558). Malkasian argues that perhaps it was KGB "heavies" who were adamant to undermine Perestroika and could have supported the massacres (1996: 53).

The Popular Front of Azerbaijan had a consensus in 1989 that Azerbaijan needed more rights from Moscow, implying that they wanted a higher status for the Azeri language, more ties with Iranian kin and broader rights for Baku (De Waal, 2003: 86). De Waal observes that despite having a wish list, there was no settlement on political methods that could result in success (De Waal, 2003: 86). The Front was divided between moderates and radicals. Abulfaz Elchibey and his group were pushing for independence whilst moderates were focused on winning Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections (De Waal, 2003: 86). It is worth mentioning that new political organizations were struggling for power and somehow the interests of Azerbaijan (as well as in Armenia and Georgia) shifted behind the power struggle rather than securing independence and transition from a Soviet to modern state. The majority of those actors outlined the priorities that deepened the crisis instead of easing it. Leila Yunusova, one of the founders of the Popular Front wrote: "having condemned the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for its totalitarianism, some of the leaders of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan had already managed to borrow the very worst from Bolshevism" (De Waal, 2003: 86). They decided to block the railway

for supplies to Armenia, thus forcing them to denounce territorial claims for Nagorno-Karabakh (New York Times 1989). The railway blockade was lifted after Azerbaijan's Soviet authorities agreed to register the Front as a legal organisation, but the communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan never fully recovered (De Waal, 2003: 87). For the National Front it was an instrument of leverage on the government as they held a meeting every day to solve the food crisis in Armenia (New York Times 1989); however, the blockade was effective for popular rhetoric and a leverage on the authorities. In the end the NFA had managed to get all the necessary concession from the Communist government, including "legalizing the Popular Front, lifting a military curfew, and — most startling of all — convening a special session of the Azerbaijani Parliament to pass a new sovereignty law, and even a right to secede" (Keller, 1989). In fact, the blockade helped the National Front to have a voice in the government, as they were allowed to attend the session of the Parliament that approved the amendments as it was televised in Azerbaijan (Keller, 1989). Nagorno-Karabakh was an apple of discord and a problem that needed legal and political as well as a social approach. None of these methods were exercised; on the contrary, instead of dialogue, strikingly radical tactics further escalated the conflict. Nationalist activists and 'patriots' (as they liked to be called) brought the republics to a confrontation by radicalizing the political space.

It is remarkable how the local intelligentsia in Azerbaijan was reluctant to condemn the massacres (the Georgian intelligentsia was also not very outspoken against Gamsakhurdia), but instead justified the pogroms, and some of them even accused the victims of being responsible for the violence (Cheterian, 2008: 104). Ziya Bunyatov, another prominent Azerbaijani scholar claimed that the Sumgait tragedy

was a provocation organized by Armenian extremists and shadow entrepreneurs who aimed at increasing tensions (Sakharov, 2006: 581). Bunyadov penned an open letter in the newsletter of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR (Bunyadov, 2010), in which he offered a short summary of Armenian history, blaming Armenian nationalist group Dashnaks for the genocide in Turkey as well as wishing to create “Armenia between the three seas” (Bunyadov, 2010). Bunyadov argues that Armenians planned and executed the massacres in Sumgait themselves:

“The Sumqayit tragedy was planned very carefully by Armenian nationalists. Several hours before it began, Armenian TV and newspaper reporters secretly infiltrated the town and lay in wait. The first to commit a criminal act was a certain Grigoryan, who was disguised as an Azerbaijani and who personally killed five Sumqayit Armenians (Bunyadov, 2010).”

The enunciator bases his claims on the quotes of historians and Russian army generals who described the events of 1915 in Turkey and wrote about the Armenian group “Dashnak” being the instigator of the genocide. Hence, Buniatov’s article becomes a performative, one which accuses Armenians of lies and pre-planned massacres of fellow Armenians. One could see the securitization of history and analogies that force the referent object [Azerbaijani nation] to accept the threat. In the article, Buniatov claims that Dashnaks were disguised as Russian servicemen in Turkey in 1915 (Bunyadov, 2010).

One could argue that the confrontation underlined the ideas and thoughts expressed by Armenian authors regarding the issue of Karabakh. Azerbaijanis remembered Balayan’s book “Ochag” (The Hotbed, 1984), a description of his travels around the “Armenian lands” including Nagorno-Karabakh. Adalet Tahirzade, who

was an aide to Elchibey and deputy education minister criticized Balayan and lack of Moscow's reaction to his ideas.

"Azerbaijanis were called savages in that book. NKAO and Nakhchivan were referred as historic Armenian territories. Moscow did not react to letters and complaints from Azerbaijan with regards to the book. He was often visiting Khankandi (Stepanakert) and making inciting speeches there...

Balayan became a hero and this book won the award of the Armenian Journalist Union... In general these actions were met by silence of Moscow and Baku."
(Tahirzade, 1997: 13-14)

One has to remember that Balayan was a prominent writer and he was a reporter for the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the foremost newspaper of the Writers' Union of the USSR. Defining Azerbaijanis as "savages" was further othering them in Armenia and at the same time deteriorating relations with Baku.

The Armenian author and a translator Armen Oganessian published an article "Vodorozdel" (Watershed) (1988). Oganessian emphasized the importance of justice for Armenia as he expressed his frustration regarding the court hearings about the Sumgait case. As a counterfactual statement, Oganessian quotes Russian generals who wrote about the atrocities committed by Turks during the 1915 genocide. Here we can observe the application of an analogy in the process of securitization (see chapter 3). Both parties operationalize history and use it as a tool for the formation of public opinion. Oganessian quotes the Qu'ran, the surah where Christians and Jews

are deemed untrustworthy,⁴⁸ arguing that in the Soviet Union one thousand Christian churches were destroyed, yet more than fifteen hundred mosques were erected (1988). Here one sees how the religious aspect gradually emerged in the discourse. The referent object (the Armenian nation) had been told that now they were Christians against Muslims and that when their churches were destroyed by the Communist government the number of mosques was on the rise (Oganesian, 1988). Following these powerful performatives, the author went further and questioned the silence of Azerbaijani intelligentsia. According to Oganesian, only one Azeri writer, Chingiz Huseinov, stated that Sumgait was a “shame” of Azerbaijan (in Oganesian, 1988).

Thus, the securitizing discourse between the intellectual elites in Armenia and Azerbaijan helped to accelerate hostilities as they stressed differences between two people. In an atheist country, religious belonging was irrelevant, and most places of worship were closed. Therefore, the inculcation of religion into discourse brought harm to potential settlement of the issue and helped the securitization of Islam in Armenia.

5.7. Black January and Khojali

‘Black January’ was the defining moment in the history of modern Azerbaijan, as well as in the escalation of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Political actors were

⁴⁸ Surah 5, Verse 51: “O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you — then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people” (translation: Google Translate, the original text is in Russian)

actively involved in preparations for the post-Soviet power distribution and used all possible methods at their disposal. Azerbaijanis were unhappy with the work of the Party's First Secretary Abdurrahman Vezirov, who was accused of conducting pro-Armenian policies (De Waal, 2003: 88). Despite his efforts to reform the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and keep Nagorno-Karabakh, the public remained critical of him (Cheterian, 2008: 116). As a result, the second secretary Viktor Polyanichko, and not the First Secretary, was the real person in charge of the republic. This concept implied that the Russian man 'on-site' was a Kremlin watchdog, and was also supposed to deal with emergencies. Polyanichko was an Afghan veteran and thought that the Islamic factor was an important variable in Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2003: 88). He was a man of Moscow and was "a second in command" in Baku (Keller, 1989).

By December 1989 the radical wing (the young intellectuals, physicist Tofik Gasimov, the Arabist Abulfaz Elchibei and the historian Ekhtibar Mamedov (Cheterian, 2008: 117)) of the Popular Front was in charge of the party and was directing public protests (De Waal, 2003: 88). The party was founded on the Baltic model,⁴⁹ and included populists like Nemat Panakhov and the Social Democrat Zarduhst Alizade; but it was the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute that gave the Front such mass support (Cheterian, 2008: 117). People were appealing against rumours that the Armenian authorities, along with the aluminium enterprise, were cutting down trees in the vicinity of Shushi without authorisation from Baku (Cheterian, 2008: 116). It is significant to note that the radical positions promoted by the Popular Front secured them the support of the lower classes, mostly the unemployed and refugees

⁴⁹ In the USSR, the three Baltic states were champions of pluralism, as they formed political parties and offered help to other fellow republics. Their approach to forming political parties was a model for others.

from Nagorno-Karabakh; however they lost the backing of the urban intelligentsia which was unwilling to affiliate itself with the aims of “militant faction” of the Front (Cheterian, 2008: 118).

On 29 December, the National Front of Azerbaijan occupied the local offices of the Communist Party in the southern town of Jalilabad. Protesters had ripped down the fences along the Iranian border as they demanded closer ties with six million Azeris who live on the Iranian side (Keller, 1990b). The Soviet government denounced the move and accused the Front of sliding into Islamism (De Waal, 2003: 89); however the party rejected Islamism and sided with secular pan-Turkist positions (Cheterian, 2008: 118). Yet, the radical wing of the Front did sign an appeal to the Politburo and the Supreme Soviet urging them to “relax” the frontier between two Azerbaijanis; referring to the 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchai, they claimed that Azerbaijan was “artificially split” (Swietochowski, 1995: 203). The incident along the Iranian border gave grounds to the Soviet press to accuse the Popular Front of supporting Islamic fundamentalism (Swietochowski, 1995). Whilst Panakhov demonstrated his nationalist ambitions to Baku and Moscow, the Armenian parliament on 10 January 1990 accepted Nagorno-Karabakh into the country’s budget and gave Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh the right to vote in Armenia’s elections, causing outrage across Azerbaijan (Swietochowski, 1995: 204). As a reaction to the events, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan summoned the National Council to oversee preparations to fight against Armenians (Swietochowski, 1995: 204). There were hostages taken during the fighting between Azeri and Armenian and Russian Interior Ministry soldiers were killed (De Waal, 2003: 89). Apparently, the nationalists were determined to use all available resources in order to mobilise

public support and securitise both Armenia and Armenians. Armenia became a word coterminous with evil and the enemy. Azerbaijanis nicknamed Abdurrahman Vezirov “Vezirian” — i.e. as Armenian (De Waal, 2003: 88) — because of his concessions and incapacity to handle the crisis (see Keller, 1990b). Radical members of the Front were constantly shouting anti-Armenian slogans: “Long live Baku without Armenians!” (De Waal, 2003: 91, see also Rost, 1990). Nationalists were on the rise to power and the Soviet government did not have the tools to prevent the crisis.

Gorbachev jetted his advisors and high-profile officials to Baku, including Evgeny Primakov, in a desperate attempt to save the situation and the USSR. Primakov was worried about the fate of the Soviet Union and was preoccupied with the task of preventing the secession of Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2003: 92). On 12 January Viktor Polyanichko held talks with the opposition leaders and established a “National [Defence] Council” that was meant to protect Azerbaijan’s borders from Armenian invasion (De Waal, 2003: 90). The Council was dominated by the nationalist leaders of the Front, Nemat Panakhov and Rahim Gaziev appeared on the local TV and told the Azerbaijani audience that Baku was full of homeless refugees, while thousands of Armenians lived comfortably in Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2003: 90). The announcement incited further violence and resulted in a mass rally on 13 January in Lenin Square. During that rally, mobs broke away from the main gathering and attacked local Armenian residents in their homes, using typed lists of their addresses (Swietochowski, 1995: 205, Nolyain, 1994: 557). On the same evening gangs participating in the rally went to attack Armenians (De Waal, 2003: 90, Binyon, 1990). Baku was transformed into a killing ground, Armenians were thrown from the balconies and windows of apartments across the city’s Armenian quarter

(Teimourian and Knipe, 1990). Threatened Armenians went to the local police stations and a cinema *Shafag* protected by the Soviet troops (De Waal, 2003: 90). The Soviet army managed to evacuate Armenian nationals with ferries to Turkmenistan and then flew them to Yerevan (Swietochowski, 1995: 205). Armenians died during the violence and some during evacuation (Radio Moscow reporting several hundred deaths (Blitz, 1990)) or in the hospitals of Yerevan, though the death toll would have been higher without evacuation (Teimourian and Knipe, 1990). Switochowski notes that certain members of the Front risked their lives to protect Armenians, yet others either refrained from condemning the pogroms, or even participated in the acts of violence (1995: 205).

De Waal emphasizes that despite the fact that Moscow sent thousands of troops to prevent the massacres and escalation of the conflict, the killings still took place (2003: 90-91). According to Azerbaijani human rights activists, many Armenians appealing to the soldiers did not get support, and were told that there was no order to intervene (2003: 91). It is also known that the writer Yusif Samedoglu called the Central Committee and asked it to intercede but was told: "Let them slaughter" (De Waal, 2003: 91, Grigorian, 2010, Vlasova et al., 1990). Armenian refugees talked about young members of the Popular Front participating in the killings, whereas many other members of the Front contradict the story and argue that they saved the lives of many Armenians (De Waal, 2003: 91). As De Waal notes, apparently both stories are true, the Front had diverse membership; Zardusht Alizadeh and Leyla Yunusova, who left the Front, blame the leaders for doing nothing to stop violence (2003: 91). Zardusht Alizadeh goes further and says that there were lists of Armenian addresses hanging outside the Popular Front headquarters, and

that the rally was organized by the Front and pogroms began shortly after that (De Waal, 2003: 91, Vlasova et al., 1990). Alizadeh states that the PF leaders were responsible for organisation and support of violence (De Waal, 2003: 91, Alizadeh, 2016).

The question is open: why did this tragedy take place and who was responsible for triggering the large-scale violence? De Waal writes about a “strange collaboration” between the nationalists and Polyanichko that gave credence to conspiracy theorists; however, one of the radical representatives of the Front, Etibar Mamedov, said that the National Defence Council presented an opportunity to arm their party legally (2003: 91). Political actors competed for influence and power, and the Communist Party and the Nationalists were in desperate need of legitimacy. Ghia Nodia and Thomas De Waal assert that maybe the Communist Party and Polyanichko in particular attempted to boost their authority by conceding to the NFA (see Nodia, 1996, De Waal, 2003: 91). There is further evidence in a report of the *New York Times* that points to three reasons:

“1). Communist Party officials actively encouraged the growth of a nationalist political movement in Azerbaijan, the Popular Front, and tried for almost a year to turn it toward more chauvinist and militant activities. 2). The police and the K.G.B. appear to have had advance knowledge of the anti-Armenian attacks that broke out in Baku on Jan. 13, but did not move to prevent them. 3). The creation in January of an unofficial Azerbaijani paramilitary organization, the so-called National Defense Committee, was initiated by local Communist Party officials in an attempt to discredit the Popular Front.” (Keller, 1990a).

The *New York Times* reports that the National Defence Committee was in fact an idea promoted and planned by Polyanchko himself (Keller, 1990a). Whilst addressing the possible scenarios of the plot, Bill Keller offers another possible explanation, in which Gorbachev himself inspired the conspiracy in order to campaign for extended presidential powers (1990a). However, one must bear in mind that the local politicians had a direct role in implementing any of these plans.

After the exodus of Armenians and the deadly violence, it seemed nothing worse could happen in Baku. However, the situation deteriorated as the Soviet government came to restore the Soviet order in post-Soviet Baku. Apparently, the Gorbachev administration was unaware that after failing to prevent the Sumgait tragedy, and losing control over the Karabakh dispute, they were incapable of governing Azerbaijan. To argue further, the *New York Times* reported that the turmoil in Azerbaijan challenged Gorbachev's faith in the possibility of smooth reform and whether the Kremlin could hold the country together without force and intimidation (Keller, 1990a). Cheterian notes that after the Soviet operation in Baku, Azerbaijanis felt that it was they who were the victims of the Soviet troops, rather than the Armenians (2008: 120). The Baku tragedy was just another phase of the failures committed by Moscow. Gorbachev sent an authoritative delegation to handle the crisis. His ally Primakov attempted to get the situation under control, and the Soviet defence minister Dmitry Yazov also went to command troops; they imposed a state of emergency in Nagorno-Karabakh, in Ganje but not in Baku (De Waal, 2003: 92, Keller, 1990a). This decision was made amid the a nationalist storm in the streets of Baku, when barricades blocked the streets and nationalist activists held access to the building of the Central Committee building (De Waal, 2003: 92).

One of the members of the Politburo's delegation, Andrei Girenko, remembers his conversations with the radical leaders who were asked to ease the tensions and begged them "to take down the barricades... to rescue people from a dangerous confrontation with the troops" (De Waal, 2003: 92).

Etibar Mamedov discusses Primakov's warnings about possible secession from the USSR, as the Moscow emissary thought that Azerbaijan was "one step away from independence", saying that "we won't permit it at any price" (De Waal, 2003: 92, Keller, 1990a). The Soviet army started its operation shortly after midnight, rolling in with tanks around the city and crashing into cars, ambulances and barricades; soldiers wounded and stabbed citizens, with about 40 thousand combat troops involved (Keller, 1990a). It is estimated that between 130 and 170 Bakuvians and 21 soldiers were killed, with several hundred (more than 700) wounded and about 400 unaccounted for on the night of the Soviet intervention. An independent military investigation "Shchit" (Shield) later⁵⁰ judged this to be a "war" on our own [Soviet] city, calling on authorities to lodge a criminal case against defence minister Yazov (De Waal, 2003: 93, Swietochowski, 1995: 205). But Yazov defined the operation as a necessary measure "to destroy the political structure of the Popular Front to prevent their victory in the upcoming elections scheduled for March 19, 1990," (Aliyev, 2010, Keller, 1990a).

De Waal evaluates the intervention as "a tragedy" for Azerbaijan and the USSR, whilst Moscow gained control of Baku but lost Azerbaijan (2003: 93). Baku's citizens came out for mass funerals, the Communist Party was at its lowest as

⁵⁰ An investigation was held during the 1990s and produced a report later that year KUSHEN, R. 1991. Conflict in the Soviet Union: Black January in Azerbaidzhan. *In*: NEIER, A. (ed.). New York: Human Rights Watch.

members publicly burned their cards (De Waal, 2003: 94), and the military operation killed the last shreds of hope that the USSR was capable to reform (Aliyev, 2010). If Gorbachev had reacted more rapidly and prevented the massacres, the nationalist would have failed to gain such massive support (Vlasova et al., 1990). The public rallied around the flag of the Popular Front, which actually was a group of political actors without any particular plan for the transformation of the republic. The Soviet leader blamed the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan for submitting to the pressures of the nationalist groups by particularly accusing Azerbaijan for permitting anti-constitutional extremists to carry out “anti-people” actions (Swietochowski, 1995: 206). In other words, Gorbachev did not admit any responsibility that the USSR authorities might have had in that particular situation. His position of accusing the nationalists in fact strengthened their stance, and pushed Azerbaijan closer to independence.

There was another tragedy in 1992 that helped Azerbaijan to “other” Armenians. The Khojali massacre in February of 1992 left another deep wound in the memory of Karabakh’s Azerbaijani population. Like the Sumgait massacre, there are scarce sources that could explain what happened on a chilly February day in the town that controlled access to the Stepanakert airport and the woods near Khojali and the Armenian village of Nakhichevanik. Most probably it was an evacuation operation which went terribly wrong and ended up in the deaths of almost one thousand Azerbaijani civilians (New York Times, 1992, Goltz, 1999: 122). As Thomas Goltz observes, Khojali was a very poorly defended village in Nagorno-Karabakh with an Azerbaijani population (Goltz, 1999: 120). Goltz, a journalist who visited the place shortly before the massacre and was among the first to report it, finds it odd that the

Azeri government did not open the road from Khojali to Aghdam, observing that the locals found it bewildering too, which suggested that “the government actually wanted the Karabakh business to simmer on, to distract public attention while the elite continued to plunder the country” (1999: 120). Brubaker and Laitin define such tactics as an intra-group mechanism that helps the “incumbents seeking to deflect within-group challenges to their position” to instigate provocations or dramatization of situation (1998: 433)

Some civilians were evacuated via helicopters, but, after the Armenian assault began on 25-26 February 1992, apparently to mark the Sumgait anniversary (Goltz, 1999: 121), the OMON commander asked the people to escape to Aghdam. Instead of Aghdam, the refugees ended up in a wood near Armenian village occupied by Armenian forces (De Waal, 2003: 171). Goltz argues that the Baku authorities had done nothing to help the non-combatant population evacuate after the Armenian ultimatum was delivered (1999: 122). Further, Goltz claims that the government in Baku had been in denial and did not report the massacre; on the contrary, they announced that Azeri forces had successfully attacked Armenians with just two casualties (Goltz, 1999: 124-125, Lieven, 1992). While the government in Baku was spreading fake reports about the war theatre, Armenians attacked the civilian population, committing the worst massacre of the conflict. Goltz observes how difficult it was to assure the Moscow correspondents of the BBC and the *Washington Post* that Armenians had attacked Azerbaijanis (1999: 124). Although many Armenian fighters did not admit killing civilians, in a conversation with a reporter from the *Guardian* they said that “they [Azerbaijanis] hide among the women and children. Any that were killed were an error. We regret all such mistakes” (Waldron,

1992). Armenians admit the civilian deaths, but one-time military leader Serzh Sarkisian, who later became the president of Armenia, noted that the Khojali helped Armenia “to break the stereotype” of not being “serious” about the demands and territorial claim (De Waal, 2003: 172).

After Khojali, both parties ended up possessing symbolic capital that was used for further mutual securitization. A war of historic analogies, narratives and national symbols has been gaining the momentum ever since. Both parties acquired discursive power that made it possible to affirm critical vulnerability of referent objects and dehumanized Armenians and Azerbaijanis for each other. Now it became acceptable to implement policies of exception and call to arms and armed confrontation. One must also note that two out of three of Armenia’s presidents were military leaders in the war for Nagorno-Karabakh (Robert Kocharian and Serzh Sarkisian). Building on the facts, one could argue that the securitization of minor differences was a successful project for political entrepreneurs in Armenia and Azerbaijan, provided that it helped them to dominate the political scene and even weaponize the Karabakh issue.

5.7.1. Symbols

The names of nationalist parties across the South Caucasus are revealing. In all three republics, parties and political groups chose symbolic names, referring to the public, nationalism or patriotism or a particular historic problem, as had been the case with the Karabakh Committee. For the former Armenian president and one of the leaders of the Committee, Karabakh was not land, it “was a human being” — a symbol of a people that had suffered seventy five years “under national oppression” (in

Cheterian, 2008: 122). Hence, the names of the political parties epitomised symbols and divided communities, fomenting violent discourse and building localized versions of the Berlin Wall. When Azerbaijani nationalists appeared on TV and accused their Armenian co-habitants of leading comfortable lives whilst Karabakh refugees suffered in temporary shelters, the “psychological crowd” was formed (Le Bon, 2001: 13). Gustav Le Bon argues that in certain circumstances, under violent emotions, the entire nation may become a crowd with sentiments and ideas heading into the same direction, eliminating conscious personality (2001: 13). Panakhov and Gaziev supported the creation of the crowd that massacred Armenians. The Soviet government — which was legally responsible for providing security to all its citizens — failed to act. The preamble of the Soviet Constitution stated that it was “a society” founded on the principles of musketeers, that the welfare of every single citizen was a “law of life” of every member of the society (1977). Yet these principles did not apply to those Armenians and Azerbaijanis who died during the clashes in January 1990.

Levon Chorbajian argues that the Azerbaijani authorities started to “terrorise” Armenian residents in the area, forcing them to abandon their homes and settle Azerbaijani nationals (1994: 37). The Karabakh Armenians raised a legal and political issue regarding the jurisdiction of the area, but the reactions from Baku and Yerevan, and the inconsistent policies of the Kremlin, escalated the situation. This demographic engineering is documented by several organizations that went to monitor the process in Armenia and Azerbaijan during the 1991 (Chorbajian, 1994: 37).

5.8. Summary

This chapter outlined the main events that triggered the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1980-90s. It called attention to the narratives and discourses which served as performatives during those turbulent years. It cited letters and opinions or interviews of prominent members of the Armenian, Azerbaijani or Soviet society securitized Armenians and Azerbaijanis against each other. It also showed how discourses concerning identity, history and historic injustice amended the direction of thought among the public. The empirical data shows that the dehumanization of *the other* drove the politics in the republics beyond the established rules of the game (see ch. 3). The choices of symbols and their cultural or historical interpretation show local conditions and, by emphasizing the distal context, i.e. “experiential, context-specific and tacit” (see ch. 3) findings, it is possible to add capacity to the “corpus of knowledge” about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Thus, this chapter has contributed to the studies of discursive conflicts and the ways political actors inflict particular beliefs on societies.

The response of the Soviet government to the Karabakh issue influenced further developments in Baku and Yerevan. The members of the intelligentsia had a profound influence in the Soviet Union, hence their opinion was taken into consideration by the wider public. In the time of *Perestroika*, the public felt under threat and looked for guidance. The new leadership evolved, but it chose negative trajectories of engagement. Prioritising an *us* and *them* dichotomy was the choice of particular political actors, writers, historians and the public of the previously isolated Soviet republics following the cause. “The competitive society celebrates its heroes, the hierarchy celebrates its patriarchs and the sect its martyrs” (Douglas, 1986: 80).

That was the case in Armenia and Azerbaijan, with both sides having successfully antagonized each other and were free to pursue a hostile agenda.

Questions remain: why did the clashes take place? Why did the government in Moscow refer to ethnic politics and launch a debate about nationalities policies without getting involved in the full research of the problem? Was it a result of Perestroika and Glasnost, or had the Soviet system used up its resources? Or was it a revelation of ethnic hatreds? Was it instrumental for the purpose of maintaining support of the regional/local leaders? These questions are unlikely to receive all-encompassing answers, but one can argue about factors or actors that more-or-less accelerated the events. Indeed, the USSR was a system hugely dependent on nationalist and ethnic policies. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Brubaker addresses the gap in managing ethnic politics. The system was based on nationalities policy but did not have the sufficient and relevant institutions for such a set-up.

Jan Koehler and Christoph Zurcher argue that it is not essential to pinpoint who started the conflict and instigated the first clashes, but rather it is about the process of disintegration of institutions that controlled the dispute and negotiated order between the groups, that matters the most (2003: 147). Their argument brings us to the difficulties that the reforms and *Perestroika* in particular faced. To quote Machiavelli, "it must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things" (1950: 21). Despite all the efforts to become a pluralistic society, the legal and social problems were mostly interpreted to be "national" that is, "ethnicity"-based. The discussion of the members of Politburo demonstrate this

approach. They constantly refer to ethnic relations and nationality policies (see section 4).

Finally, this empirical section shows how the actors on all sides of the barricade securitized symbols, artefacts, and history, in order to build symbolic capital to help them gain power in the post-Soviet order. My findings depict how putting ethnicity into the spotlight of political discourse atomized and divided a society. One can see how the clashes in Sumgait, Baku and finally in Khojali created the existential threats that helped legitimise the breaking of rules (see Balzacq 2011b). Armenia and Azerbaijan created the hierarchy of threats where their ethnicity was the key denominator of loyalty and possibility of survival. In other words, if someone was Armenian in Azerbaijan, or the other way around, they were depicted as threats to national identity, national existence and the country. The regime of truth that made these atrocities possible was a socially constructed undertaking. The speech acts of prominent members of the intelligentsia demonstrate the vulnerability of pluralism, as it requires constant process of communication of diverse ideas and thoughts. Yet the elites in Armenia and Azerbaijan were selecting symbols from the past that in fact attacked the foundations of their consequent societies: diversity and multiculturalism. The distal context of securitization uncovers how particular political entrepreneurs inflicted resentment on the people.

6. Chapter Six

Georgia at War with Itself

6.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the discourses that divided Georgia between liberalism and nationalism, the rights of the majority and the minority, and how the force of liberation from the USSR transformed into “ethnic hegemonism and anti-pluralism” (Jones, 1993: 288). Nationalist leaders built a discursive wall and fractured society into antagonistic clusters that were unable to communicate and negotiate. As many agree, one will find it impossible to understand the reasons of alienation of minorities without reference to Gamsakhurdia’s concept of extreme nationalism (English, 2008: 23). This chapter acts as a thematic guide to the discursive wars between Tbilisi, Sokhumi and Tskhinvali at the time when Moscow’s involvement caused resentment among Georgians. By engaging with the political debate about nationalism and ethnicity, it tells a story of securitization in the 1980s in the Soviet republic of Georgia. At the time of the conflict, Georgia was a quasi-independent state and the Soviet Union was disintegrating (it was dissolved on 26 December 1991).

This chapter comprises two large sections, with one featuring Georgia’s Ossetian dilemma and the other providing insight into the escalation of the Abkhaz issue. The first section outlines those performatives found in the speeches of politicians and intellectuals about South Ossetia, which eventually became messages aimed at Abkhaz. It focuses on the ideas that governed public opinion at a time of great social turbulence. The second section is about Abkhazia and deals with the language of disputes before the war in 1992. In sum, this chapter, analyses the

power of performatives that created the discourse of destruction and shows how Georgians made a part of their “We”, the “Other”. Finally, it concludes with some broader observations about securitization and society. By supporting differentiation among its regions and citizens, Georgia gradually went to war with itself. The country sleepwalked into what can be defined as the most significant crisis since the Soviet occupation of 1921.

6.2. Political escalation

The story of the first escalation of the crisis in Georgia began with the decision, by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, to abolish the autonomous status of South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia always viewed Georgia as a unitary state and never tolerated devolution (see English, 2008: 21). South Ossetia was the first ‘victim’ of those policies. Or, to be more precise, it was easier to attack the status of an oblast than of a republic (Abkhazia) (see Chapter 4)⁵¹.

Gamsakhurdia, a literary critic, translator of Charles Baudelaire and a son of the renowned Georgian writer Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, was a favourite among nationalist leaders. He was one of the intellectuals from Tbilisi who attached deep emotional content to the idea of nationalism and ethnicity (Tishkov, 1997: 13). To borrow from Valery Tishkov, he was a “type” who converted myths and emotions into a socio-political tool (1997: 13). He was seen by Georgians as an emblematic example of a patriot and a charismatic leader (see English, 2008, Ditych, 2010: 13) who was treated as “a superhuman” with “exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber,

⁵¹ Constitutionally, South Ossetia had a less significant status than Abkhazia.

1964: 358, see Geoika, 2009). He placed great emphasis on the emotional response of the public and often manipulated the facts in his favour. Such credentials had seemed to damage his authority and ability to govern the country, although it was his charisma that helped him to win Presidency in 1991.

Georgian dissidents pursued two separate lines: on the one hand they were reporting human rights abuses, exposing the Soviet regime, and at the same time they promoted the discourse of nationalism, campaigning for the Georgian language and sensitive to issues of ethnic relations (Cheterian, 2008: 158-159). Making the cultural and national pre-eminence of Georgians the central point of the independence discourse had produced tremendous consequences. Allocating principal significance to ethnicity made Georgia vulnerable to divisions, while at the same time disenfranchising non-Georgian citizens. The perception of the majority of Georgian dissidents was defined as a struggle between Soviet “cosmopolitanism” and Georgian national heritage, which, according to Cheterian, was problematic as it excluded almost a third of Georgia’s population (2008: 159). For Gamsakhurdia, democracy was a secondary achievement after independence (Jones, 2013: 57). However, the prism chosen by the dissidents-turned-nationalists was not very Georgian. This was a product of a fragmented history that was taught to their generation of students (see chapter 4). Having been a bridge between civilizations and continents, Georgia always celebrated its diversity and culture. Heterogeneity was reflected in architecture, as well as in poetry and literature. However, as mentioned earlier, the operationalisation of history demeaned the significance and role of multiculturalism. Cheterian argues that the nationalist discourse threatened

ethnic minorities, but that they thought that the Soviet government could be a guarantor of their rights, or at the very least of the status quo (2008: 159).

Gamsakhurdia was arrested in 1977 for anti-Soviet activities which he recounted on Soviet television (see also Cheterian, 2008: 160, Gugushvili, 2011), and later testified against two Western reporters (Nodia, 1996: 77). In the speech, he names officials of the US Embassy in Moscow who allegedly gave him anti-Soviet literature. Thanks to his confession, he received a mild sentence and lived in a remote North Caucasus town (Kachubey) for three years before being released, whilst his accomplice, Merab Kostava, refused to confess and was sent to a Siberian (Perm) prison (Chagelishvili, 2002b). Kostava was only released in 1987. This episode had cast a doubt on Gamsakhurdia's further political career, particularly after the sudden death of Kostava amid dubious circumstances in late 1989.

Later Gamsakhurdia claimed that he left prison because was concerned that the nationalist movement had been left leaderless after his and Kostava's arrest (Nodia, 1996: 77). Apart from his ambiguous political biography, he managed to consolidate the nationalist forces and gain power in post-Communist Georgia. His political party, "Round Table — Independent Georgia" (the name was associated with King Arthur), won the majority of parliamentary seats and made him the leader of the country. His allies and party members introduced radical hyper-nationalism as a new norm. They fundamentally changed the tone and language of the official narrative, instilling aggression and intolerance toward non-Georgian citizens (Chagelishvili, 2002b). The "Round Table" representatives controlled the main TV channel and the country gradually started to slide into autocracy. This was a new

post-Communist Georgia that embraced the worst traditions of Bolshevism with a new vigour.

Nationalistic discourse was activated in Georgia in 1980s and peaked during 1987-1990. The very first nationalist rally was held on 14 April 1978, when the students of Tbilisi State University came into the streets to defend the status of the Georgian language (see Sakwa, 1998: 241, Cheterian, 2008: 161). The Soviet Government prepared a constitutional amendment that was to limit the status of the Georgian language and replace the official language of the republic with Russian (Smith et al., 1998: 172). Eduard Shevardnadze (then the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia) sided with the youth, referring to the public opinions of workers and the intelligentsia (Archive, 2017, Shevardnadze, 2006: 87-100). He managed to secure the status of the Georgian language. In an interview from 1998, Shevardnadze insisted that it was his decision to side with students and to preserve the official status of Georgian language (Reality, 2015).

Those events were fruitful soil on which to build the nationalistic narrative and ignite patriotism across the country. Leaders such as Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Merab Kostava, Giorgi Chanturia, and others gained popular support and campaigned for an independent Georgia. Gorbachev's policies, *glasnost* in particular, had opened up new avenues for the nationalist groups. Now they had a chance to participate in the debates that Gorbachev was offering to the suppressed and isolated Soviet people. However, the nationalist leaders opted for a radical discourse and decided to rally the people around the Georgian flag that had originally

been a symbol of the Mensheviks.⁵² 1988 and 1989 were the crucial years for the freedom fighters, when they organized and led mass protests across the country. The main message of that undertaking was an independent Georgia that would embrace the values and ideals of the French Revolution.

The first wave of demonstrations started in November 1988, when almost two hundred thousand people gathered to reject the proposed changes to the Soviet Constitution that would strip republics of the theoretical right to secede from the USSR, but the proposed amendments were withdrawn for fear of further national mobilization (Cheterian, 2008: 162). By organizing massive protests, the nationalists and freedom fighters saw new momentum and the opportunity now that the USSR was disintegrating, and it saw possible to obtain independence. To quote a leading Georgian intellectual of the time, Akaki Bakradze: “I wish for the imploding of the Soviet Empire as soon as possible”. Cheterian notes that the nationalists succeeded in creating a sense of urgency and that change was on its way (in 2008: 163). Bakradze was a prominent public intellectual and an academic whose ideas shaped the political discourse of the time, and he admitted that Georgia was competing with a far bigger adversary: Russia. In an interview in 1991, he emphasizes the fact that Georgia was conducting a “battle” and that the only resource it could use was intellectual supremacy and the management of economic problems (Bakradze, 1991). Yet Bakradze was disliked by Gamsakhurdia, and his party and was pushed to the fringes (Kakabadze, 2013).

⁵² Mensheviks governed Georgia between 1918-21 and fled the country after the Soviet occupation. Their ideology was based on democratic credentials, but their legacy perhaps suggests the opposite (see AVALISHVILI, Z. 1940. *The independence of Georgia in International Politics 1918-1921* London: Headley Brothers.)

In January 1989, the London newspaper *The Independent* reported on the events in the South Caucasus based on a piece in the Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*. The Soviet newspaper identified “Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Merab Kostava and Gia Chanturia as the main instigators of 'inhumanity, adventurism and barbarism,' and of organising meetings and marches 'to stir up national hatreds'” (Cornwell, 1989). Since November 1988, there had been mass protests across Georgia, including hunger strikes. The “speakers at the rallies demanded Georgia's withdrawal from the Soviet Union, and shouted slogans such as 'Georgia for the Georgians,' 'Long live Georgian independence,' 'Let blood flow' and 'To terror we will reply with terror'” (Cornwell, 1989). Many leaders in the aftermath of the tragedy that happened on 9 April 1989 denied the slogans, though those words were uttered and groups marched through the streets of Tbilisi crying out those words, threatening and mobilizing communities (Chagelishvili, 2002b). These protests and demands articulated by the nationalist groups caused a sense of insecurity among the citizens. Everyone discussed politics: taxi drivers, shopkeepers, teachers, students and their parents. The discourse of national identity and nationalism transformed multicultural Tbilisi into an arena for chauvinists and nationalists. They looked for ‘others’ in their midst, which led to the disintegration and segregation of society. Georgia was heading toward a rift between Zviadists (those who shared Gamsakhurdia’s nationalist views) and anti-Zviadists — the section of society that knew nationalism was a self-defeating tool and rejected Gamsakhurdia’s stance. One of the participants of those events and a prominent film director, Goga Khaindrava, confirmed during an interview that Gamsakhurdia’s discourse was a deliberate attempt to stir enmity through his speeches (Khaindrava, 2013).

The culmination of the nationalist discourse and anti-Soviet demands was 9 April 1989. In the early hours of the morning, Soviet special forces dissolved the anti-Soviet hunger strike in Rustaveli Avenue in central Tbilisi. The leaders of the opposition, i.e. the nationalists, knew there might be bloodshed, as Soviet tanks were ready to intervene in Lenin Square, just few hundred meters away from the hunger strike. The leader of the Church of All Georgia Ilia II went to address the protesters and asked them to dissolve the strike and follow him to the church across the street. Ilia said “there was a threat” and that the “threat is a few minutes away” (see also Cheterian, 2008: 164, Imedi, 2013). However, the footage demonstrates how the nationalist leaders reacted to the news. They were furious about the Patriarch’s plea, and, concerned about their reputation and accusations of treason, they rejected a compromise. They were worried they might be accused of “national treason” and stayed on the site (Imedi, 2013). After refusing to disband, several thousand people faced the tanks which were rolling in, while Soviet forces used tear gas and batons to dissolve the protesters. Interestingly, none of the nationalist leaders were injured, but 21 young people died and hundreds of poisoned or injured individuals were taken to the hospitals in Tbilisi, with the government commission estimating that about 4000 applied for medical treatment (see Cheterian, 2008: 164, Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989: 65). The April tragedy was a watershed moment for nationalists and the Communist Party, and the Central Committee’s incapacity to manage the crisis helped the freedom fighters to accentuate their nationalistic sentiments.

The next day Tbilisi was quiet — in mourning — and its citizens were asking why the tragedy had happened in the first place. It is argued that some of the

nationalist leaders were in favour of a violent scenario,⁵³ because a bloody outcome meant more tools for the political mobilization of the nation around the flag of unity and against the Communist regime. That morning of 9 April was the beginning of the final stage in empowerment of the nationalist and historic narratives that were later used to escalate the situation in the republic. The tragedy, which was a demonstration of inability of the USSR government to deal with the crisis, helped the nationalist leaders to strengthen their positions and pursue an agenda of identity-based political order. Similarly, to the crisis in Baku, the Soviet government had only one option — the use of force. And force meant more power and authority to the nationalist groups who in the public perception defended national interests. By opting for a violent response, the Soviet government in effect outsourced power to the opposition groups, and was left unable to govern. According to a poll presented to the Central Committee in Tbilisi shortly after the events, 71 per cent of respondents had a negative view of the Communist leadership and 42 per cent claimed that the Communist Party was against the public interest (Slider, 1991: 66). Tensions were so high that eventually the Soviet Deputy from Georgian SSR Tamaz Gamkrelidze warned the Congress of Soviet Deputies that “it may give rise to unforeseeable actions at any moment” (speech quoted in Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989: 69). On that Sunday morning of 9 April, Tbilisi residents began to ask about the first secretary of the Communist Party Jumber Patiashvili, who was absent from the public scene. The formal leader of the republic was unable to prevent the tragedy

⁵³ Gamsakhurdia, Z. 1992. ‘Baton Igor Yakovlevs’. Available at: <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gSDL/cgi-bin/library.exe?e=d-01000-00---off-0preziden--00-1---0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-1l--11-ka-50---20-about---00-3-1-00-0-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=CL4.7&d=HASH4b769f64c2b7db295da449> This is a copy of the letter addressed to Igor Yakovlev, head of the Soviet TV, Gamsakhurdia accuses him of misinformation when the First Channel of the Soviet TV broadcast news that Gamsakhurdia said in an interview that “blood” was necessary.

(Kaufman, 2001: 102), which resulted in a loss of credibility for the Communist government.

In an interview in 2013, Patiashvili did explain his position, arguing that he was a victim of the nationalists' behaviour (Patiashvili, 2013). Apparently, he was not prepared for a massive nationalist mobilization. Yet he denied any affiliation with nationalists, while admitting that most of his colleagues from other republics, particularly the Baltic states, thought that Patiashvili was empowering national forces in order to secure his post-Soviet position in the government. This is an accusation that he categorically denies (Patiashvili, 2013).

However, in his notes from the meeting of the Politburo on 20 April 1989, Gorbachev's aide Anatoly Chernyaev writes that Gorbachev had accused Patiashvili of "having a taste" for "decisive action" — i.e. the use of force (2000: 219). Despite preaching about democracy and the need for engagement, Gorbachev could not persuade his cadres⁵⁴ to work through political means, as they thought that would be an apparent sign of weakness (Chernyaev, 2000: 219). For Gorbachev, 9 April was a "crisis of methods" where the KGB, the Main Intelligence Directorate, the Party and the Foreign Ministry had their own interests, and he could recognise their "handwriting" in the events in Tbilisi (Chernyaev, 2000: 219). Not only was Gorbachev adamant on this point, but his head of the government Nikolai Ryzhkov also claimed that he (Ryzhkov) got the news about Tbilisi from *Pravda* (Chernyaev, 2000). Chernyaev's reports reveal that the Ministry of Defence and the conservative block of the Soviet leadership, who considered Perestroika as betrayal of the

⁵⁴ Patiashvili was a personal friend of Gorbachev; they went to the Soviet Party School together

principles of the 1917 October Revolution, ordered the breakup of the peaceful protestors. Gorbachev directly accused Dmitry Yazov (Minister of Defence) of an abuse of authority and declared, “the army cannot get involved in civilian affairs without the knowledge of the Politburo” (Chernyaev, 2000: 220). Chernyaev remembers his private discussion the next day with Gorbachev (after their Politburo session), when he stated that “the Georgian leadership crap in their pants and send the army, Russian boys, against the people” (2000: 220). Gorbachev was let down by the *siloviki*⁵⁵ (security forces allied with the military) branch of the Communist government. Yet at the same time his own “cadres” were ill-prepared to fulfil his agenda of the liberalization and transformation of the USSR. Patiashvili possessed the capabilities to limit the radicals, but he did not use them. He allowed the radicals to escalate the situation and, later on, was entrapped by his own inaction/passivity. Undoubtedly, he wished to deny any of those accusations, yet there are too many facts that speak against him.

A moderate politician of the time, Nodar Natadze, confirms the claims that the Communists in fact helped and deliberately encouraged “radicals”, and in particular supported Gamsakhurdia’s eminence (Nodia, 1996: 76). As Nodia argues, the Communists had a “reason” to boost radicals because the Baltic states’ example demonstrated that moderate opposition politicians were much more consistent and dangerous compared to populists, who just rallied in the streets and had loud slogans (1996: 76). At the same time, Nodia acknowledges that the “morally bankrupted” government backed down, as it was unable to distinguish between the legal and

⁵⁵ These people represented the military elite of the USSR and were the main organizers of the August putsch in 1991.

illegal methods of political competition (1996: 76). Suffice to say that both views may be valid as the post 9 April leader of the Communist Party Givi Gumbaridze, supported many of the initiatives of nationalists and Gamsakhurdia in particular, while a tandem of Communists and radicals side-lined the moderate parties.

The failure of the Soviet experiment to promote openness and democracy across the republics and communities had unintended consequences. Article 9 of the Soviet Constitution stipulated that social democracy was the main direction of the political development of the state (1977). It emphasized the importance of social participation, the expansion of openness and the consideration of public opinion (1977). Yet this article was not practiced; it was a symbol of the Soviet democracy rather than a working instrument supposed to serve the state and its units (see Sakwa 1998). Now nationalists referred to the Constitution and asked the government in Moscow to acknowledge the rights of the republics, which also implied the right to secede (1977). As mentioned earlier, the 9 April strengthened the demands of nationalists and added legitimacy to their cause. After the tragedy, the Communist government lost credibility as the public sided with the nationalists (Chagelishvili, 2002b). One could argue that national identification became a political force powerful enough to challenge the Communist monopoly on power. Shortly after the crisis the freedom fighters organized marches against the Communist regime chanting assaulting words and accusing then Communist administration of the Georgian SSR of treason of their country (Chagelishvili, 2002b). Gamsakhurdia and his party were on the road to power and by May 1991, Georgia, although formally part of the Soviet Union, had an elected Supreme Soviet and its leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Gamsakhurdia was a radical who manipulated the moderate

Georgian populace into a chauvinistic mob (Jones, 2006: 257). His ideas were based mainly on the threat of Georgia's disintegration, the fear of Russian power and the possible neglect of Georgian interests (Jones, 2006: 257). Gamsakhurdia portrayed Georgians as victims in their own state, referring to two national traumas: the 9 April 1989 and the 15 July clashes in Sokhumi (Jones, 2006: 257). His discourse was the source of the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy in Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian relations. He openly claimed that the Abkhaz as a nation does not exist at all, and that it was just a name of a Western Georgian province (Chagelishvili, 2002a). Stephen Jones thinks that in a time of volatility and instability, of physical and economic insecurity it was understandable that a tiny country like Georgia led by inexperienced elites could have had a different attitude toward political issues (2006: 257). Yet it was the boundary between the discrimination and privilege defined by ethnicity that played the major role. A normative authority was assigned to ethnic belonging that weaponised the difference. Indeed, insecurity was part of the post-Communist agenda, although taking into consideration Gamsakhurdia's knowledge of nationalism he would have been aware of the risks inherent in dogmatized discourse.

Gamsakhurdia's vision of a unitary Georgia was translated into nationalist discourse and stirred up ethnic sentiments. He thought that his project would take time to be implemented, but he chose to start with South Ossetia (George, 2009: 110). He always demonstrated his religious (Christian) outlook and the belief that Georgia was a "martyr" nation.⁵⁶ Gamsakhurdia called on paramilitary groups such as Jaba Ioseliani's *Mkhedrioni* to arrange a defensive force during the rally to

⁵⁶ He used the word in several speeches that are quoted in the thesis.

Tskhinvali, “to protect independence” (George, 2009: 111). Ioseliani’s group, along with other armed militias, went to Tskhinvali to “fix the situation” (George, 2009: 111), that was their interpretation of the action. “Fixing” the problem, meant the use of force against Ossetians who shared the secessionist idea and wished to separate from Georgia. The “peaceful” rally ended in violent clashes that lasted for two days, killing six, and injuring 140 people on both sides (George, 2009: 111).

Another important decision that served to increase the segregation between the multinational communities, was the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Georgia in August 1990 that banned regionally-based political organizations and parties from parliamentary elections (planned for October of 1990) (Zverev, 1996: 42). Such policies were clearly a demonstration of a nationalistic stance. The Central Committee of the Communist Party in Tbilisi was under pressure from the nationalist groups and issued an exclusive decision that side-lined Abkhaz and Ossetian political entities. After winning the elections Gamsakhurdia announced that the autonomous regions/oblasts would be preserved, but despite his declaration Ossetian autonomy was abolished on 22 November 1990. He saw the autonomies as “divisive vestiges” of the Soviet system (English, 2008: 23). At the same time, the regional (Abkhaz and Ossetian) political actors were isolated from the main political events in Tbilisi — the elections disenfranchised the national minorities, making them ‘others’, and thus different from the rest of Georgia (see also Cheterian, 2008: 174). The main reason for this disenfranchisement was the decision of the Communist administration to ban the Abkhaz and Ossetian political parties from the first parliamentary elections in the history of Soviet Georgia. Additionally, Gamsakhurdia offered a new citizenship law in summer 1990; he insisted that only those Georgians whose forbears had lived in

Georgia before the Tsarist occupation in 1801 were eligible to qualify (Jones, 1993: 295, Forsyth, 2013: 681).

Some of the nationalists disagreed with Gamsakhurdia and announced the decision to abolish South Ossetia's autonomous status as "politically unjustified and premature", for example, Giorgi Chanturia thought it was an inappropriate and premature step given that Georgia was not yet a fully independent state (Zverev, 1996: 44). Chanturia thought that such a move was a trump card awarded to the Kremlin (Zverev, 1996: 44), because Georgian nationalists thought that ethnic differences would be the first pressure point for the Kremlin against the independence movement in Georgia (Chagelishvili, 2002b). In a personal interview Irakli Shengleia⁵⁷ confirmed these disagreements, and he cited their conversations when Chanturia was against the radical alienation of ethnic minorities (2013). The problem with the entire nationalist movement was their radicalism, for despite being against the abolition of autonomy, Chanturia's analysis had its own flaws. He did not offer any middle ground, but was convinced that the autonomy should be abolished after Georgia received international recognition. The footage of those years demonstrate that, overall, the entire movement shared Gamsakhurdia's radical ideology about the unitary state in Georgia (Chagelishvili, 2002b).

Gamsakhurdia went further in the Ossetian issue and sent paramilitaries to Tskhinvali in December 1990, launching a blockade of the region that lasted until July 1992 (Zverev, 1996: 44). Gorbachev reacted on 7 January 1991, by repealing both decisions i.e. proclamation of the Ossetian Autonomous Republic and the Georgian

⁵⁷ He was an active and influential member of the independence movement but did not join Gamsakhurdia's party. He is an academic specializing in the studies of Caucasus.

decision to abolish the autonomy (Zverev, 1996: 44). Gorbachev's decree ordered both parties to withdraw paramilitaries and military formations within three days, but the Georgian Supreme Soviet rejected the order and no steps were taken toward de-escalation (Zverev, 1996: 44). However, a week later the president of the Chamber of Nationalities of the USSR visited Tbilisi and found a compromise: Georgia was asked to acknowledge that its police force was under the subordination of the Soviet Ministry of Interior and in return was given an opportunity to deal with South Ossetia "as it saw fit" (Zverev, 1996: 44).

This deal was again a demonstration of the failure of the Soviet authorities to govern the units and use appropriate instruments to solve the conflicts. Instead, the Soviet government demonstrated that it sought formal acknowledgement of its power, while in reality it controlled nothing. While the Kremlin received an assurance that they still supervised the police (militia) in Georgia on paper, in reality they had no tools of leverage.

In response to Gorbachev's decision, Gamsakhurdia wrote an open letter to the Soviet leader asking him to rethink the issue and to refrain from intervention in the internal matters of Georgia. Gamsakhurdia denounced the order on the withdrawal of armed forces, as the Soviet army was entitled to stay in the premises (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 48).⁵⁸ Gamsakhurdia spoke in the name of the Georgian people and wrote to Gorbachev about the 'fury' experienced across Georgia by non-Georgians as well as those who wished to continue the path to independence along the Georgian nation (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 48). The Georgian nationalist leader

⁵⁸ This is a collection of primary sources about conflicts in Georgia collected and published by the Centre for Study of Regionalism, Tbilisi, Georgia

thought that a few separatists and extremists who managed to occupy high-profile positions in South Ossetia had tried to impede Georgia's 2000-year struggle for territorial integrity and for that region in particular (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 48). Gamsakhurdia then offered a short course in the history of Shida Kartli or Samachablo⁵⁹ and restated his position that Ossetians were not entitled to the lands they resided in, defining the autonomous status as an illegal act imposed upon the Georgian people by the Soviet occupiers who did not have the consent of the Georgian people in the 1920s (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 48-49). For Gamsakhurdia, then, the status was illegal and he was radical in defining it thus, appealing to Gorbachev to deal with the South Ossetian issue exclusively, without reference to other Soviet autonomies, as he emphasized the unique case of Samachablo (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 49). Gamsakhurdia referred to Ossetians as "a bunch of extremists" who were wrapped in the 'mantle of fighters for self-determination' and requested the USSR government to recognize Georgia's right to sovereignty (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 49). By highlighting many historical examples and using powerful rhetoric, the letter aimed to demonstrate a patriotic stance and expose the Soviet regime. Further, the letter asked Gorbachev to make it clear to the "separatists" that they would not have the backing of the central government in Moscow (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 51).

Gamsakhurdia's letter and explicit contextualization of history securitized the historic narrative. His language and empowerment of symbols helps to define a subjective meaning of an action (see Yanow ch.3). It reveals how ethnic difference

⁵⁹ These are the alternative names of the territory. Shida Kartli means middle Kartli (Kartli is an ancient Georgian province that gave name to Saqartvelo [Georgia]) and Samachablo is a name of principdom after prince Machabeli who owned the province in the medieval period.

was assigned a priority in the discourse, making the securitization of ethnic difference the main policy of nationalists. It was Gamsakhurida's choice to interpret historic myths in hostile terms, and it is hard to overestimate the importance of his influence. It was his preference to paint the world in Hobbesian terms (see Snyder ch.3) that wove "designative connections" between the meaning of the words (see Taylor ch.3). Lexical choices represent thought as thought represents itself (Foucault ch.3) helping to examine and understand the distal context of the securitization in Georgia at the time. The narrative of *us v them* created mental images of an enemy (e.g. Abkhaz or Ossetian) that was an existential threat to Georgia and Georgianness.

A mutual boycott of elections and referendums added radicalism to the debate over the future of Georgia and South Ossetia as a federative unit. In 1991, Gorbachev initiated a USSR-wide referendum about the future of the Union. The question was simple: whether the people of the USSR were for or against keeping the Union. Gamsakhurdia denounced the referendum and announced that it would be boycotted by Georgia (Zverev, 1996: 45). Contrary to his point, the South Ossetian and Abkhaz authorities decided to take part in the referendum and they voted for the Union. Meanwhile, in Georgia, Gamsakhurdia proposed a referendum on the independence of Georgia from the USSR, which was boycotted by the Ossetians (as well as Abkhaz), and Georgians voted for independence with over 90 per cent voting in favour.

In 1992 there was another referendum in South Ossetia where the people were asked whether they wished to join Russia, with more than 90 per cent voting for the proposal, while the local Georgian population boycotted the vote (Zverev, 1996: 45). South Ossetian authorities put up two questions for the public

referendum. The first one was about the independence of South Ossetia: “Do you agree or disagree that South Ossetia be an independent republic?”. And the second question was: “Do you agree or disagree with the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the South Ossetian Republic to join Russia?” (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 287). On 24 January 1992, the Ossetian Electoral Commission announced that 99 per cent of voters supported self-determination and at the same time voted to join Russia. The statement emphasized the aspirations of the Ossetian people toward self-determination and political change (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 289). It stressed the significance of the people’s will that was freely expressed despite the accusations of pressure (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 289).⁶⁰ Simultaneously, the Commission rejected the Georgian claims that Ossetians who lived outside the autonomous oblast did not support the independence and join Russia, as the refugees who participated in the referendum in North Ossetia praised the idea (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 289). It was indicated in the statement that the South Ossetian authorities were firmly following international norms and their path to democratic transition was lawful (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 289).

6.3. Mutual accusations

Georgians linked the territorial issue and Ossetian discontent to being “historical victim” in-between empires and viewed national minorities as a fifth column (Sammut, 1996: 8). The historical pattern permeates ethnic difference, as the history of the Georgian kingdom is ethnicized, particularly in Soviet historiography.

⁶⁰ Georgian political groups accused extremist forces in instigating the public unrest.

Ultimately, the history that was published and publicized during Soviet times is the one that dominates the hearts and minds of the nation. That particular approach to history was the only method used in Soviet historiography. Instrumentalization of stories and myths opened political opportunities for nationalists. It is worth noting that several generations of Georgian schoolchildren did not study the history of Georgia at all in the Soviet period. The lack of education, lack of knowledge of history and multiple existing myths about the heroic past of the Georgian nation made for very fruitful soil for the nationalist leaders and their followers to create an advantageous discourse for the mobilization of popular support.

The Ossetian version of this dilemma contradicts the Georgian. Ludwig Chibirov, then chairman of the South Ossetian Supreme Council, defined the aspirations for independence as a “pragmatic” matter for the Ossetian people, who had suffered “genocide” from Georgians (Sammut, 1996: 8). The language of communication between polities had underlined only negative memories. Ossetians defined the local clashes during the Menshevik government as an attempt by Georgians to annihilate Ossetians in the 1920s. The struggle between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the post-imperialist South Caucasus was a political matter of clashing ideologies and political leaders. Mensheviks ran the short-lived independent Georgian Democratic Republic, while the Bolsheviks wished to seize power and managed to bring Ossetians into their camp. Accordingly, the Menshevik leadership fought against the Ossetian rebels who supported the Bolsheviks.

In the 1990s, Chibirov declared that South Ossetia was looking for security and Russia was the only guarantor of the small nation’s survival: “...this striving for survival as an ethno-political entity — and identity — drove us to ‘side with Soviet

Russia' — not our genetic love for Bolshevism, Sovietism and other 'isms'..." (Sammut, 1996: 8). In other words, Chibirov used the events of the 1920s to claim the threat and depict the Georgians as enemies. In the 1920s the Bolsheviks overtook the Menshevik government and annexed Georgia. The South Ossetian territory, which was previously known as Samachablo, was granted an autonomous status within Georgia. If Ossetians viewed autonomy as a legal shield or as a protection from future threats, Georgians perceived the autonomous status as a forcible tool or an artificial edifice to pursue Russian imperial interests in Georgia (Sammut, 1996: 9). The discourse illuminates the insecurities experienced by the Ossetian authorities and public as a result (see Zverev, 1996: 14-17). Residents of the tiny region were scared to listen to Georgian radicals, whose leaders used the sense of insecurity to promote power positions. On the one hand, Georgian nationalists disliked all non-Georgians and depicted them as threats, but Ossetian leaders felt insecure and gained public support for their own nationalist projects. Ossetians asked for support from kindred ethnicity in the North, set up paramilitary formations, and expelled foreigners from their territories (Zverev, 1996: 14).

Notably for the Ossetians, the separation from Tbilisi was as legitimate as Georgia's drive for independence from the USSR (Cheterian, 2008: 172). Besides, the Ossetians feared an independent Georgia as they were worried about a nationalist backlash, because the Georgian nationalists were prepared to return to the Constitution of 1921, which did not allocate any legal status to South Ossetia or Abkhazia (Cheterian, 2008: 172). Another dimension for the Ossetians was the perspective of losing Moscow as an "overlord" who for them represented a judge, a mediator and preserved the balance in the Caucasus. This made Ossetians fearful of

facing their bigger neighbour, Georgia, without any institutional instruments of negotiation or dispute resolution (Cheterian, 2008: 173). The nationalists' speeches and narratives embodied divisions that indeed intensified the fear of South Ossetians. Gamsakhurdia's performatives emphasizing the holy mission of Georgians and statements that non-Georgians were unwelcome guests widened the gulf between the two groups. The reinforcement of the Menshevik Constitution from 1921 by the Supreme Council under his leadership produced an even bigger schism within the country.

Alexei Zverev notes that history was one of the main variables that escalated the conflict, along with geopolitical and socio-economic factors (Zverev, 1996: 15). These two different discourses about the history of Georgian and South Ossetian relations clashed and caused a political crisis after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This political ambiguity was constructed out of an ethnicized history, and alleged security threats to the existence of both parties and ethnos as such. In other words, the political entrepreneurs referred to the possibility of the annihilation of ethnic minority groups. Georgian nationalists referred to the widespread Georgian fear of becoming extinct. Georgian medieval noblemen had, for centuries, exploited the fear that one day Georgia might cease to exist altogether.⁶¹

In the light of the mutually aggressive discourse between Georgians and Ossetians, as well as the overall instability, the South Ossetians founded a political party, "Adamon Nykhas" (Popular Shrine), and expressed solidarity with the Abkhaz

⁶¹ There is a phrase, "ar gadavshendebit", which means "we will never get extinct" — the ideas that Georgia has to fight for existence in the world, perhaps was one of the ways to legitimize multiple struggles and war that Georgian noblemen fought in medieval times.

people and declared their own national aspirations (Sammut, 1996: 10). AN's leader, Alan Chochiev, was a historian at the Tskhinvali Pedagogical Institute (Cheterian, 2008: 173). He published an open letter in the Abkhaz newspaper *Bzib* and expressed full support for the aspirations to sovereignty of the Abkhaz people. Chochiev appeals to the Abkhaz people and hails their struggle for sovereignty: "...we are worried by the tendency to ignore the legal requests of the Abkhaz people that are aspiring toward genuine sovereignty" (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 14). Chochiev notes that the "brotherly" Georgian nation used to block the initiatives of the Abkhaz people to gain independence, and that by then Ossetians hoped the attempt will be successful (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 14). They were hoping for a legal precedent to be just and equal,

"...and no longer be a part of the discriminated vertical, a hierarchy that allocated rights and privileges according to ranks, we are delighted with the courage and unity of Abkhaz people, which rejects any compromise and fights for the re-installation of sovereignty that is the only way of development for an ancient nation with rich culture and economic potential" (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 14).

Chochiev's closing remarks are to Abkhaz people and he indicates that the official South Ossetian authorities think the same way, albeit they lack "courage" to speak out (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 15). The noteworthy fact is that the Abkhaz newspapers were not distributed in the rest of Georgia and it was a Georgian weekly newspaper, *Literaturuli Saqartvelo* (Literary Georgia), that re-printed selected anti-Georgian letters or extracts from the Abkhaz or Ossetian press. One can argue that the newspaper of the writers of Georgia was distributing selective stories that securitized and "othered" ethnically different citizens of their country. Additionally,

Gamsakhurdia, along with his allies, were in control of the nationwide discourse about identity, statehood and the purity of Georgia. They were promoting the idea of a unitary Georgia. Eventually, such publications caused public outrage, and many intellectuals started to challenge the ideas expressed in the autonomous entities that were unacceptable for Georgians and the perceptions of nationalists. One newspaper eventually became a medium between communities, and this news outlet was totally controlled by nationalist ideology.

Chochiev's letter was followed by a response from the Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia that denounced his beliefs, declarations and ideas about the differences in the autonomy. The letter stated that the people of South Ossetia disagree with Chochiev's remarks and were "deeply concerned" with Chochiev's intention to trigger inter-ethnic conflict (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 15). In the answer to Chochiev, the Soviet points to the "attempt" to "artificially" deteriorate the relations between different ethnicities and accuses Chochiev of presenting his "hideous subjective ideas" as widely accepted by the Ossetian people (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 15). The supreme soviet letter expresses the belief that the millennia of cohabitation and cooperation could not be wiped out by individuals who wish to stir up ethnic hatred (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 16).

It has to be noted that the status of South Ossetia was not a political matter in the Soviet period, unlike that of Abkhazia. Ossetians suffered along with the rest of the Soviet people under the collectivisation and *korenizatsiya* projects,⁶² but they

⁶² Korenizatsiya was a policy of the integration of different nationalities into one state by accommodating national cultural aspirations. Source: GEORGIA, P. O. საქართველოს რესპუბლიკის კანონი სამხრეთ ოსეთის ავტონომიური ოლქის გაუქმების შესახებ [Online]. Tbilisi. Available: http://www.parliament.ge/files/613_8104_833304_-7.pdf [Accessed 2015].

did not complain widely nor did they campaign for an upgrade of status (George, 2009: 105). George notes that Abkhazians and South Ossetians similarly had an icon of the Soviet villain — Stalin — an ethnic Georgian who was the main architect of the Soviet hierarchy. Stalin epitomized all the sufferings experienced in the 1930s, but his repressions and assassinations affected ethnic Georgians too. However, his ethnicity helped to prevent his legacy from being reassessed, and few Georgians criticized his policies.

Julie George argues that there was a three sided victimisation, all parties had their complaints and they could not manage to channel them through political lines (2009: 104). Radicals on all sides made enough efforts to escalate the differences. Georgians suddenly stopped using the name South Ossetia, substituting it with Samachablo (Machabeli's land, a principdom in medieval Georgia), Shida Kartli or Tskhinvali region, making Ossetians angry and enraged (Zverev, 1996: 43).

6.4. Normative wars

The South Ossetian okrug presented its secessionist demands in 1989-90. Georgian authorities passed the law in August 1989 (under nationalist demands), declaring the Georgian language to be the official language for all administrative and policy organs (George, 2009: 110). Concerned about the constitutional status of the Georgian language, the Communist government created a special commission to assure the purity of the language at all levels in all cities, towns and regions of the Georgian SSR (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 25). This new law implicitly excluded the citizens of the Georgian SSR who did not speak Georgian from all forthcoming projects of independence and political process altogether. It also ordered the translation of all

foreign language media broadcasted across the republic into Georgian or the insertion of Georgian subtitles (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 26). With such exclusionary and divisive steps toward independence and sovereignty, Georgia left its own citizens outside the space of the new state. Amid the disintegrating Soviet Union, divisive political decisions were fuelling nationalism and granting more space for action to radical leaders.

South Ossetian authorities prepared their answer to the norm of exclusivity. They ordered the implementation of the State Programme of the Ossetian Language (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 27). A New decree allowed students from South Ossetia to gain exemptions from the law about Georgian language (Diasamidze, 2002-2011: 28). The excessive patriotism demonstrated by Georgian nationalists and the Communist government that followed their demands increased the rift between Georgians and the minorities residing in the republic [the similar to Abkhazia, when Abkhaz gained privileges and exemptions to get into universities (Slider, 1985)]. Tbilisi and Tskhinvali launched a normative war that escalated the conflict and made the negotiation process much more difficult. One could argue that the steps taken by the Georgian officials to improve relations with minorities were in fact widening the gap and dividing societies.

In November 1989 the South Ossetian Congress of People's Deputies requested a status upgrade to the ASSR from the Georgian Communist Party sending the same appeal to the Soviet Union Communist Party (George, 2009: 110). The authorities in Tbilisi swiftly declared the request to be illegal, stating that Adamon Nykhas was not an official political group and had no right to participate in the drafting of the demand (George, 2009: 110). On 23 November 1989, the situation

deteriorated as 20,000 Georgians marched to Tskhinvali, “to defend the Georgian population” (Zverev, 1996: 43, Cheterian, 2008: 175). The Soviet Ministry of Interior managed to prevent the crowd from entering Tskhinvali, but some of the paramilitary groups went to the nearby villages causing small skirmishes with Ossetian communities (Zverev, 1996: 43). There were casualties and negotiations between Gamsakhurdia and Ossetian representative Kim Tsagolov did not succeed in securing peace. Gamsakhurdia told him: “I shall bring a 200,000-strong army. Not a single Ossetian will remain in the land of Samachablo. I demand that the Soviet flags be removed!” (Zverev, 1996: 43, Cheterian, 2008: 175). One of the leaders of the nationalists, Giorgi Chanturia (assassinated in 1994), admitted that the march to Tskhinvali was a “great mistake” (Zverev, 1996: 44). It is apparent how Georgian nationalist leaders had managed strained relations with the autonomous units of the Soviet Republic of Georgia. Their discourse and threats built further antagonism and alienated the public in Tskhinvali. The wording chosen by Gamsakhurdia, “no single Ossetian will remain”, was a powerful performative that helped the local political groups to secure support against Tbilisi and Georgians altogether.

At the same time, power shifts were taking place in South Ossetia. Local political actors competed for leadership, forming a post-Soviet political elite there. Alan Chochiev, a leader of the National Front was the frontrunner (George, 2009: 113). Julie George notes that the position held by Gamsakhurdia was an impediment to the forging of ties between elites in Tbilisi and Tskhinvali (2009: 113). There were no actual negotiations between the disputing parties, thus increasing the possibility of violence (George, 2009: 113). George quotes a historian, David Darchiashvili, who suggests that it was mainly the “inexperience of Gamsakhurdia’s and South Ossetian

leadership” to be blamed, and that only Russians were experienced in the craft of diplomacy (George, 2009: 113). Inexperience could be taken into consideration when looking for the reason, but the entire doctrine of the *Round Table* was anti-federalist and uncompromising. The state-building plan championed by Gamsakhurdia was exclusive, rejecting the consideration of any other ethnicities. The nationalist agenda was ethnicity-centred, producing divisive unintended or intended consequences. Additionally, Gamsakhurdia was one of the most well-educated and intelligent members of the movement.

The situation worsened when the Russia-brokered negotiations between Georgians and Ossetians took place in January 1991. Gamsakhurdia arrested the Ossetian leader Kulumbegov for treason in presence of the Russian officers (Zverev, 1996: 45, George, 2009: 113). The violent and aggressive approach of Georgian representatives fuelled tensions and George notes that the dominant language of communication was either the parliamentary declarations or radical *démarches* (2009: 114). Such an evaluation is confirmed by then foreign minister Giorgi Khoshtaria, who admits the mistakes made during the crisis blaming lack of any political negotiation (George, 2009: 114).

A senior politician who is one of the leading experts on the conflicts in the South Caucasus spoke anonymously about the normative war between Tskhinvali and Tbilisi, as he notes “unlawful” was the word applied to every Ossetian paper sent to the Georgian capital, that actually moved Tskhinvali closer to Moscow (Anonymous, 2013). He confirms that Georgian authorities put zero effort toward understanding of Ossetia’s problems and demands. Arguing about the geopolitical character of the conflict he defines as “irresponsible” when rhetoric was reminiscent

of the Soviet totalitarian discourse, hence Georgia did not receive as much support as the Baltic states did (Anonymous, 2013).

“The problem of Georgia was that nationalism was driving the change in the aftermath of the Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia’s language was unacceptable for the West, and that is the reason why Georgia started to receive the Western support later than the Baltic states. For the West nationalism and Soviet imperialism were both intolerable” (Anonymous, 2013).

By using harsh language, Gamsakhurdia equalled Ossetian people to a handful of extremist leaders bringing Moscow and Tskhinvali ever closer (Anonymous, 2013). Being an active supporter of the independence the respondent thinks that it was an act of “hypocrisy” to think that it was possible to build a new state without incorporating ethnic minorities across Georgia (Anonymous, 2013). Notwithstanding, vociferous nationalists who were part of the emerging political elite were aware of the risks,⁶³ yet they lost the argument with more active demagogues who bred intolerance and enmity between ethnically diverse population of Georgia.

6.5. Escalating decisions

If Nagorno-Karabakh was the first conflict in the South Caucasus on the Soviet watch, South Ossetia was the first dilemma faced by the political elite of semi-independent Georgia. By the time of disputes Georgia had a Communist Party Committee and quasi-legal nationalists with popular support who managed to force the Communists

⁶³ A private conversation with a former nationalist leader in Tbilisi, 2013

to hold elections. To a certain extent, the immature and inexperienced political groups that gained power in post-Soviet Georgia did not consider the political consequences of their populist narrative. They cherished Georgian nationalism and largely ignored the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country. The *Round Table* chose one paradigm, focusing on nationalistic discourse and exclusivity. Gamsakhurdia positioned himself as the saviour of the Georgian nation that had been suppressed by the USSR.

The legal battle between the units of the Soviet Republic of Georgia started with a declaration sanctioned by the last Communist government of Georgia. After the tragedy of 9 April 1989, the nationalists acquired extra leverage over the local Soviet government. As a result, the new First Secretary Givi Gumbaridze opted for a soft approach toward new political groups. He was put under pressure and the government adopted a declaration on “Providing Guarantees for Protection of State Sovereignty of Georgia” (1990) — this document based on the findings of a legal task force of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR, admitted that the military operation conducted by Russia in February 1921 was an act of military intervention and occupation aimed at changing the regime and annexing the state politically (1990). This act demanded respect for the Russo-Georgian agreement from May 1920 and the aggression was classified as the violation of that agreement (1990). The Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR was urged to reinstate the rights of the Georgian republic set out in the 1920 agreement (1990). According to the declaration the agreement from May 1920 between Peasants and Labourers of the Georgian SSR and the Russian SFSR and the Unions Treaty from March 1922 forming Transcaucasian Federal Republic was annulled (1990). The declaration stated that Georgian SSR was to

launch negotiations about the independence from the Soviet Union and that the Union Treaty of December 1922 founding the USSR was unlawful in relation to Georgia (1990)⁶⁴.

The declaration was an additional boost for nationalist groups who claimed victory against the USSR government, which was then forced to make concessions. It was the first signal to autonomous entities that Georgia intended to revise the treaties and agreements of the Soviet period unilaterally. Yet, none of the nationalist leaders considered inviting the representatives from Abkhazia and South Ossetia to discuss new legal framework for a post-Soviet order.

Apparently, the decision mostly focused on acknowledging populist discourse championed by the nationalists and their leaders. The unilateral declaration and abolition of the union treaties was a sign to the autonomous units that their legal status was under threat and the antagonistic discourse gained governmental support. To be more specific, the Communist government in Tbilisi acted to pacify the nationalists but ignored the challenges of autonomies and their status. The Central Committee adopted a declaration that put independence on the immediate agenda, but forgot the multi-ethnic texture of the republic. In this case both nationalists and Communists contributed to furthering the aggravation of the situation.

The Communist Party leadership went further and ordered the establishment of a special commission to prepare the legal framework for proclamation of

⁶⁴ Dadgenileba Saqartvelos sakhelmtsipo suverenitetis datsvis garantiebis shesakheb. 1990. Saqartvelos SSR Uzenaesi Sabchos Utskebebi. no. 3 p. 8-10. Available at: http://www.rrc.ge/law/dadg_1990_03_09_q.htm?lawid=223&lng_3=ge [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

independence of Georgia in line “with international legal norms guaranteeing national self-determination, the UN Charter, international pacts on human rights, including the Helsinki and Vienna acts” referring to the fact that the Georgian people made a decision to be independent in May 1918, and the communiqué acknowledged the right of Georgia to restore the independence (1990).⁶⁵

Events developed rapidly without the need for popular consent. The Communist Party in Georgia listened to the nationalist leaders, whose discourse had a more profound influence than any other organisation or institution. It is widely believed in Georgian society that the Communist government allowed the nationalists to cross a red line (Nodia, 1996). They saw the opportunity to occupy the public space, and popularize historic and nationalist narratives that created cleavages in the country.

The High Council of the Republic of Georgia abolished the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the South Ossetian Autonomous District (Oblast) to become a Democratic Republic of the Soviet Union. The declaration states:

“The Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia notes that in the recent period the separatist movements have become active in the South Ossetian Autonomous District, the fact encroaches the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Georgia.

⁶⁵ Dadgenileba Saqartvelos sakhelmtsipo suverenitetis datsvis garantiebis shesakheb. 1990. Saqartvelos SSR Uzenaesi Sabchos Utskebebi. no. 3 p. 8-10. Available at: http://www.rrc.ge/law/dadg_1990_03_09_q.htm?lawid=223&lng_3=ge [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

The declaration adopted by the Council of People's Deputies of the District on 20 September 1990 to declare the Soviet Democratic Republic of South Ossetia is a proving the intent" (NPLG).

The Council was preoccupied by the activities of the autonomous oblast, and issued a full statement that abolished the initiative of Ossetians to hold elections on 2 December 1990. The statement declared:

"To abolish the decision of the Council of People's Deputies of the District about transformation of the autonomous oblast into so called 'Soviet Democratic Republic of South Ossetia' and hence all the decision made by the entity, including a declaration to hold elections on 2 December 1990, as they contradict the acting Constitution of the Republic of Georgia, as well as clauses of the USSR Constitution and the declaration of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic from 21 September 1990.

The Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia calls upon the residents of the Autonomous District, particularly those of Ossetian ethnic origin to demonstrate prudence, political perception, vigilance and give rightful evaluation to the separatist movements and their activities, that can cause massive destabilization and heavy unforeseen outcomes" (NPLG).

The declaration is derogatory towards the residents of the autonomy. It demonstrates the supreme position of the authorities in Tbilisi and calls on a minority okrug to adhere to the central government without holding any consultations. The term "separatist" was used in Tbilisi, but in South Ossetia they were "freedom fighters"; the conflict of adjectives and modifiers between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali was aggressive causing further escalation of tensions. In autumn 1990, the Soviet Union still existed but Georgia was on the path to independence. Nationalist movements

had increased in position and popularity due to the events of April 1989. The harsh rhetoric of the nationalist parties and political groups brought Georgia to the forefront of anti-Soviet demonstrations, so the National Democratic Party, the Round Table and other political entities gained widespread support as they emphasized Georgian nationalism and the importance of independence. Their discourse created a bubble which meant most Georgians believed that Georgia had to gain independence from the Soviet Union and become a unitary state.

Most political groups did miss one important point: Georgia was a republic with three autonomous entities, and any constitutional change had to be carefully negotiated between all parties. The nationalist groups ignored the legal framework that existed in reality, and tried to invent an imaginary state for Georgians. Independence was a huge issue; apart from political actors, it occupied the hearts and minds of writers, actors, poets and artists — in other words, nationalist groups allured the intelligentsia of the Soviet Georgia. The possible establishment of a unitary Georgian state was the biggest delusion offered by the nationalists.

It could be said that the political and legal limits that had to be carefully thought out and negotiated with autonomous entities were totally ignored and became victims of the independence discourse. The Soviet Union was collapsing and the active political groups and their leaders knew it. Despite Moscow's efforts to save the empire, the economic problems were too deep and widespread. The Soviet project was doomed to fail, but nationalists were actively pursuing their goals. Their discourse paved the way to an exclusive community of Georgians who wished to be independent but could not fully comprehend what independence implied. One of the leaders of the movement at the time revealed in a private discussion that they of

course were aware of risks that exclusive discourse implied for the future of autonomous units, but he said independence was the most important, in essence a holy mission for them.⁶⁶

The Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Georgia stated that the decision was in the best interest of the state, because they “had fought” for the “sovereignty and territorial integrity” of Georgia but restated that their intention was to protect the rights of minorities in the country (NPLG). Yet the understanding of sovereignty in 1980s in Georgia was distorted, as the footage of the public rallies show many nationalist leaders believed that Georgia was capable of sustaining an isolated existence in the world. Almost none of the leaders had thought out a plan of economic development and international integration. By creating a conversational reality, they disregarded the factual challenges that a newly independent state had to face. The nationalistic discourse not only alienated the autonomous entities but put Georgian society under threat, because of fictional reality they had created.

The Supreme Soviet of Georgia went further and abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia altogether on 11 December 1990. The law adopted by the Council states that despite “several notifications” the South Ossetian authorities held illegal elections on 9 December 1990 (Georgia). Therefore, the Council decided to abolish the autonomy and the Soviet of Deputies along with the decree from 1922 that founded the district (Georgia). Referring to the absence of the consent of the Georgian population in 1922, the law states that the autonomy was “against the interests of Georgia” (Georgia). According to the text the fact (i.e. the violation of

⁶⁶ A private talk with a one-time nationalist leader who did not wish to disclose his name and affiliation. Tbilisi, 2013

Georgia's interests) had been proved several times during the existence of the autonomy (though the law did not indicate any particular examples) (Georgia). The statement elucidates that the Ossetian people have their "statehood" in the Soviet Union, i.e. the Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia, and finally because more Ossetians live outside South Ossetia enjoying "cultural autonomy", the Supreme Council of Georgia decided to nullify the status (Georgia).

The 'independent' Supreme Council was elected on 28 October 1990 and while it was a representative body, at the same time, Georgia was still part of the Soviet Union. Georgians thus managed to have two governments at that time, although neither of them could claim efficiency. Notably, the new leadership operated on the basis of popular legitimacy, while the old Soviet government was in a crisis of governance and unable to prevent the nationalist fervour, as the new Council set out a hyper-nationalistic agenda.

The language of the law about the abolition of the status was divisive, and the Council in Tbilisi decided to close the issue of the region without any consultations. If the point is evaluated as a communicative action, it is apparent that the Council that was a 'legitimate' representative of new Georgia diminished the importance of the autonomous entities and ethnic minorities altogether.⁶⁷ That was message spread to the ethnic minorities across Georgia was threatening in tone. The autonomous status in the hierarchical system of the Soviet Union did not imply rights in its Western understanding, but the status was a symbol for the small nations elucidating their authenticity. While the Constitution of the USSR enshrined many

⁶⁷ However, the autonomous republics did not elect the Supreme Council, because they boycotted the elections.

pluralistic doctrines, they were never actually implemented, because the essential law of the Union was a symbolic document that did not apply to reality. According to Article 76 of the Constitution the Soviet, Socialist Republics had their own constitutions and were “independent to perform state power on their territories”, whilst the USSR was the guarantor of their sovereignty (1977). The same document indicated that the laws about the autonomous oblast are delegated to the Supreme Soviet of Deputies of the Republic and must be presented by the autonomous Soviet of Deputies (1977). However, the Soviet government in Tbilisi was strictly following directives from Moscow, which meant that Soviet-era rules had to be renegotiated carefully, with the involvement of all parties. Instead of entering into dialogue, a body empowered by the majority of Georgia’s population, nullified the status of South Ossetia.

In the case of South Ossetia, the Georgian authorities prioritized territorial integrity. It could be claimed that not only the authorities but the populace overall held this priority, as the recordings of the rallies show the depth and gravity of public outrage toward the demands of Ossetians and Abkhaz. The declarations and bills that were passed by the parliament referred exclusively to the importance of the territorial integrity of Georgia. It meant that only territories were important for future development, ignoring human agency and society in the autonomous entities. This discourse comfortably coincided with the historic narratives used by political groups to mobilize popular consent.

Eric Labs argues that weak states choose sovereignty over security when making alignment choices, in other words they opt for territorial control against physical well-being (in Jebb, 2004: 6). Undoubtedly, Georgia was a weak and fragile

entity in the fragmenting Soviet Union. Consequently, the rhetoric of might and territorial control was the nation-building tool used by the power-hungry political groups. It was popular to write a nation rather than draw up a coherent strategy for further development. Perhaps it was less demanding to shout out nationalist slogans than it was to work out a step-by-step guide for a new state and its citizens. Gamsakhurdia's favourite practices were mass rallies, mobilized around the discourse of the greatness of Georgia. During the rally on 26 May 1989 (the independence day proclaimed by Mensheviks in 1918), he addressed a crowd by hailing Georgia's great and heroic past that made it possible to defeat the "empires of darkness" and stated that Georgia was prepared to fight even bigger "empires of darkness" (Geoika, 2009). He declared that Saint George and other saints, as well as "saintly blood" were standing with them (Geoika, 2009). In the same speech Gamsakhurdia uses the word "blood" about 10 times (in the space of 4 minutes) saying that the path of the Georgian nation is the path of martyrdom, which is Christ's way and that Georgia has no other option. He ended the speech hailing and cheering the unbeatable and Christian Georgia (Geoika, 2009). Gamsakhurdia intentionally created the discourse of bloodshed and martyrdom that, as he believed, Georgia was destined to follow. Every time he spoke about Georgia he used the expression "Georgian nation" or "Kartveli Eri" — an exclusive and nationalistic definition any leader should avoid, because *Kartveli* defines people from the region of central Georgia — *Kartli* — but it does not include any other areas like Guria or Kakheti, let alone Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

Gamsakhurdia gained power and succeeded in the competition for the leadership. He placed a great emphasis on symbols and history, as he depicted

himself to be a heavenly messenger, a saviour of Georgia. As a result, symbols became the main focus of the statehood. It seemed like Georgia was an artefact rather than a living nation in progress. Of course, the new leadership had to design a nation-building project, but the liminal (transitional) process had to focus on physical welfare and human security rather than on the symbolic capital of the past. That capital was aimed at dividing communities and was destined to fail both the leadership and the country. Additionally, as explained in Chapter 3, the past used by the nationalist groups was mostly contested, and overall the armed confrontation was ignited by rhetoric which professed an imagined symbolic capital, but which only delayed the possibility of re-assessment of the former Communist order and creation of an open and dynamic society.

6.6. Disagreements over Constitutional History with Abkhazia

A constitutional blunder between Tbilisi and Sokhumi was at the centre of the political disagreements. Abkhazia was a semi-independent principedom that joined the Tsarist Russia in 1864. The Tsarist Russia had viewed the South Caucasus as a single entity and governed it as *gubernias*, subsequently, Abkhazia was a part of Kutaisi Gubernia. Yet the fall of the Romanov dynasty and the short-lived independence of Georgia illuminated the challenges that a state had to manage. Despite having been a kingdom for centuries, Georgia lacked any institutions that could provide institutional memory and the capacity to adjust to independence. In other words, to become a nation-state that incorporates pluralism and embraces its minorities on a normative basis was seen as difficult. This apparent lack of norms

and rules that could have assured functioning of a tolerant society were not put in place by any of monarchs.

In 1918, Georgia was facing a very different reality — a world of sovereign states that worked toward the institutionalisation of political and legal disputes. The Menshevik government attempted to face these challenges and introduced a Constitution that was adopted on 21 February 1921, but the Bolsheviks annexed Georgia four days later. Despite the Mensheviks' efforts to lay down the founding principles of the Georgian state (as a nation-state) the issue of autonomous entities was rather vague. Article 107 of the document stated: "Abkhazia, Sokhumi district, Muslim Georgia, [Batumi district] and Zakatala district are inviolable parts of Georgia and are granted local autonomous rights"(1921). In fact, that Constitution failed to clarify what the local autonomy implied for the districts and how they were allowed to exercise the rights. Autonomy was a platitude, a word that implied a different status but did not clarify the actual rights that it was supposed to secure. It is worth emphasising that valency of "autonomy" has been under scrutiny ever since. Particularly for Abkhaz, the promise of wider autonomy and devolution was associated with broken promises of Mensheviks (see Hewitt, 1993: 279).

The next stage in the constitutional misunderstanding started with the Bolshevik rule. On 31 March 1921, Abkhazia proclaimed itself to be an independent Soviet Socialist Republic, a status which was kept until December 1921, when the Abkhazian SSR joined Georgian SSR under the Treaty of Union (Zverev, 1996: 39, Hewitt, 1993: 281). The Treaty of Union stipulated "the military, political and financial-economic cooperation with each-other" where foreign affairs were

delegated to Georgian side.⁶⁸ Georgia and Abkhazia co-habited under the Treaty up until 1931, when the Abkhazian Republic was incorporated into Georgian SSR and joined the USSR with entitlement to autonomous republic rather than Soviet republic (Zverev, 1996: 39). Hence, Abkhazia ended up in the second tier of the Soviet hierarchy.

There is one ethnic argument in the dispute: the leaders who engineered the establishment of the USSR and arranged Abkhazia's autonomous status in Georgia were Georgians — Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria (see Coppieters, 2002: 92). The Abkhaz were confident that the reason behind such constitutional arrangement was a bias in favour of Georgia. To be more precise, they thought that two Georgians made a decision in the best Georgian interest, and that they were victims of Stalinist repressions, even though hundreds of thousands of Georgians were victims of the same regime (Zverev, 1996: 39). The entire population of the Soviet Union was a victim of epistemic, physiological or physical violence and it is difficult to argue as to who had the bigger share in the suffering. If Tsarist rulers forcefully evicted the Muslim population of Abkhazia to Turkey (then the Ottoman Empire), the Soviet administration conducted planned resettlement of Georgians to Abkhazia (Zverev, 1996: 39). During the USSR there were three petitions (1956, 1967 and 1978) addressed to the Moscow government, as Abkhaz intellectuals asked to separate from Georgia and join the Russian Federation, but the only results were some cultural or educational concessions (Zverev, 1996: 39).

⁶⁸ Union Treaty Between the SSR of Georgia and the SSR of Abkhazia - 16 December 1921. Available at: <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/reports-and-key-texts/601-union-treaty-between-december-1921> [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

Dating back to 1920s, the differences continued to divide the polities of Abkhazia and Soviet Georgia. Another significant issue was a perception formed during the Soviet times. Georgians viewed Abkhazians as a tool of manipulation used by Moscow that was deceitful and needed to be broken (Carrère d'Encausse, 1993: 75). However, Abkhazians saw Georgians as a dominant force that was too weak to form a federal state but appealed to history to claim that Georgia was hospitable and tolerant (Carrère d'Encausse, 1993: 75).

In the 1980s the bilateral ties were not at the best between Tbilisi and Sokhumi, but the discourse initiated by the nationalist leaders in Georgia further escalated their complex relationship. Freedom fighters organized their narratives along ethnic lines and the ideals of the French Revolution. Nationalism and ethnicity became a politically virulent commodity that triggered an explosion of legal and political differences.

6.7. The 'Letter of Abkhaz' (Likhny Declaration) and other open statements

The Abkhaz community organized an assembly of All Abkhaz in the village of Likhny in March 1989. "Aidgilara", the political movement for independence, was the main organiser of the congress, which assembled about thirty thousand delegates. The gathering adopted a special letter/declaration⁶⁹ addressed to the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and asked him to reinstate Lenin's principles — to make Abkhazia a Soviet Socialist Republic. This meant that Abkhazia was asking the Kremlin to upgrade its status from a sub-unit to a full-member (or titular) republic of the

⁶⁹ it was a declaration based on the Letter of 1978

Union.⁷⁰ Stuart Kaufman argues that the official leaders in Sokhumi were “pressured” to sign the declaration as they faced more 30 000 people in the village that symbolized the historic place of Abkhaz uprising in 1866 (2001: 103), whereas Hewitt claims that even ethnic Georgians subscribed to the principles of the declaration (1993: 283, see Ardzinba in Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989: 80), as they watched the suppression of the rights of the Abkhaz.

Notably, this was not the first letter drafted for the Kremlin. In 1978, when changes were proposed to the Soviet Constitution, 130 prominent Abkhaz intellectuals drafted a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow and complained about political status of Abkhazia. They accused Georgian government of “Beria-ite” policies, aimed at the further Georgianisation of the region (Slider, 1985: 59). However, the local leader Valery Khintba accused protesters of “an apolitical, slanderous letter” that was distorting relations between Abkhaz and Georgians, and claimed that some of the signatures were forged (Slider, 1985: 59). Shevardnadze, the leader of the Communist Party of Georgia at the time, tried to resolve the crisis and admitted that the Abkhaz leadership failed as they were not close enough to the “people to share their interests and control the situation” (quoted in Slider, 1985: 60, see also Hewitt, 1993: 282). Despite the Politburo sending a special delegation to Sokhumi there was no actual decision made about the constitutional changes in the status, instead there were several “cadre” changes and delays in addressing the issue. The biggest breakthrough for Abkhaz was the upgrade of the Pedagogical Institute to the Abkhaz State University in 1979, the deed

⁷⁰ Text of the declaration available here in Russian: <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

Shevardnadze was proud of up until his death. Yet the concessions or changes did not create a long-term impact, with the rise of Georgian nationalism the dilemma arouse again. Darrell Slider thinks that, in 1978, the relatively low visibility of the Abkhaz people and their problems defined Moscow's relatively low-key involvement in addressing the issue (Slider, 1985: 66).

Abkhazia was initially a republic in the full right, but as the authors of the letter argue, it was Stalin who changed the balance of power in favour of Georgia (see Hewitt, 1993). In the end, Abkhazia became an autonomous republic in Georgia, and joined the USSR via Georgia. Interestingly, the Georgian public thought that it was Stalin's project to grant Abkhazia autonomy and thus lay a political mine that could detonate at any time (Forsyth, 2013: 629). In other words, both sides were unanimous in their objection to Stalin's vision. Both of them believed that the Soviet arrangement was designed to diminish their status and position within the region. Therefore, the parties launched a hostile deliberation about the issue in the 1980s.

The author of one letter complained about oppression and the restriction of rights within Georgia and asked Gorbachev to protect the Abkhaz nation.⁷¹ They stated that the experience of cohabitation with Georgia "demonstrated the impossibility of equal existence" and that it was necessary to reinstall "Lenin's principles of Soviet federation, that granted real sovereignty to its members".⁷² One has to question the definition of sovereignty in this debate. Sovereignty in its Westphalian understanding was not granted to any units of the Soviet Union. It was

⁷¹ Likhny Declaration <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

⁷² Likhny Declaration <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

the USSR which enjoyed full sovereignty and acted in the name of its republics. The 1977 Constitution of the USSR laid down the main principles and granted the Soviet Socialist Republics the right to secede but in reality, it was impossible to implement. Accordingly, the quest for “real sovereignty” was unsustainable. In fact, the Abkhaz were asking for the right to be a Soviet Socialist Republic, rather than an autonomous entity within Georgia.

The Letter stated that due to changing circumstances, pluralism, glasnost and democracy the Abkhaz people thought it was reasonable to ask for changes and amend the terms of USSR membership.⁷³ A broad historic explanation of the decision is outlined in the letter. The Abkhaz refer to correspondence between Abkhaz leaders in the 1920s and Lenin and Stalin. They indicate that Lenin did grant Abkhazia republican status, but that it was Stalin who defined the decision as “unreasonable” and made Abkhazia an autonomous republic instead, because he considered Abkhazia to be “politically and economically unsustainable”.⁷⁴ The letter recalls the repressed and assassinated leaders and citizens of Abkhazia, the time of terror and insecurity. However, what they do not mention is that the terror and insecurity was USSR-wide and that not a single republic escaped the aggressive hand of the regime.

Another significant issue in the discourse of the tie is the demographic data, which the Abkhaz link to Soviet and Tsarist social engineering. The Likhny Letter argued that the Abkhaz are “very different people” from Georgians, with a “unique

⁷³ Likhny Declaration <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

⁷⁴ Likhny Declaration <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

culture” and an “independent history” (see Hewitt, 1993).⁷⁵ The authors remind the Soviet government of the oppression and discrimination to which the Menshevik government exposed them, and praise the Bolsheviks for saving Abkhazia. But the formulation is somehow unclear: they claim that the Soviet regime was a time of terror and oppression, and at the same time thank them for their support. They wish Stalin to be seen as representative of another regime, yet Stalin was the main architect of the state from which they sought support and direct control.

In the Letter Abkhaz refer to a false history they thought was aimed at downgrading the importance of the Abkhaz nation and shatter its very existence. They were unhappy with the Georgian (Tbilisi) government’s dominant role in Abkhaz life, because they saw a continuity in policies of Mensheviks and Beria that benefited ethnic Georgians (Hewitt, 1993: 283). The letter notes the growing nationalistic rhetoric across Georgia and referenced to a quote from the newspaper *Literaturuli Saqartvelo*, where one author calls on everyone wishing to live in Georgia to behave like a Georgian, speak Georgian, or else leave (see also Hewitt, 2013: 61-63). The declaration mentioned “forced assimilation” and the problem of the decreasing population. They criticized Georgian historiography and urged that the Moscow government should consider modifications due to changing global circumstances, as they thought that the Abkhazian constitutional status was no longer an efficient tool for the economic and social development of Abkhazia.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Likhny Declaration <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

⁷⁶ Likhny Declaration <http://abkhazia.narod.ru/Glava1-3.htm> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

It is hard to disagree that the changing global order demanded change within the Soviet Union. Yet why did the Abkhaz decide to ask Moscow for support, and why did they not negotiate with Tbilisi? Perhaps the Georgian leadership was not receptive to start talks with the Abkhaz, and the Abkhaz went directly to ask Moscow's assistance rather than look for allies in Tbilisi. George Hewitt notes that the Abkhaz left the room for the Georgians to offer credible policies, when they re-established the 1925 Constitution, which according to Hewitt meant that the Abkhaz were ready to negotiate a new union treaty between Tbilisi and Sokhumi (Hewitt, 1993: 291). Like Hewitt, Stanislav Lakoba also points to the attempts to put proposals and "build bridges", though he argues that they were rejected (1995: 98). However, the Georgian government, particularly the Gamsakhurdia, chose the 1921 constitution which did not include the Abkhaz status at all. At the time, Georgian nationalists, equipped with rhetoric and a nationalist discourse, were threatening all non-Georgians across Georgia (Kaufman, 2001: 101). In the time of uncertainty, opposition parties in Tbilisi were further radicalising the differences and narratives featuring ethnic minorities in Georgia. Their nationalistic discourse and persistent reference to historic narratives legitimized the Abkhaz plea to Moscow. During an informal conversation, one of the leaders of the nationalist movement acknowledged the threat that nationalism posed to minorities, but indicated that the main goal of their movement was independence for Georgia, and if some people felt insecure it was irrelevant for the *just* cause of freedom.⁷⁷ Yet the same person did not answer the question as to how the nationalists measured what was just. Hewitt argues that it was the "fatal mistake" made by the Georgian (Kartvelian) side when,

⁷⁷ Private talk by the author with one of the popular leaders of nationalists in Georgia, July 2013

instead of consolidating 30 per cent of non-Georgian population for the cause of independence from the USSR, they “played a nationalist card”, as the motto “Georgia for Georgians” was shared by all main opposition leaders (1993: 286).

The Letter of Abkhaz was the main manifesto addressed to Gorbachev and some of his aides. Such an appeal meant a new page in Abkhaz-Georgian relations, particularly in the times of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. The Abkhaz people demanded a new contract, and it was Tbilisi’s turn to respond. However, the Communist government in Tbilisi lacked legitimacy, whilst the nationalist opposition was deluded and could not ascertain the scale of threats to the nation and a society. In the midst of the Abkhaz crisis, the nationalist opposition (Irina Sarishvili) told *Newsweek* that a nationwide strike could persuade Gorbachev to listen to their demands (Bogert, 1989), rather than open a conversation about existing legal contradictions with Abkhaz representatives.

The Georgian intelligentsia summoned an emergency meeting in Tbilisi, where most of the nationalists condemned the proposals of Abkhaz and refused to acknowledge the complexity of the situation (Gugushvili, 2009, Hewitt, 2013: 62). Gamsakhurdia assessed the “events in Abkhazia” as a “trap” designed by the Kremlin and stated that Georgia was not going to “fall into it” (Gugushvili, 2009). He declared that “we” (Georgia) would use “legal and scientific methods” to solve the problem, but if that could not prove “our truth” then Georgia will use “other ways” that will inevitably be productive (Gugushvili, 2009). Gamsakhurdia sent an ultimatum to Moscow, arguing that if Gorbachev refuses to back Georgia than they will call “a nationwide strike” and show their muscles to the Kremlin (Gugushvili, 2009). Apart from Gamsakhurdia, other participants were alarmed about the possibility of

Abkhazia's secession and labelled those as "extremists" who acted against the Georgian people (Hewitt, 2013: 62). At the same time, "extremist" was a word of choice on the other side in Abkhazia. Vladislav Ardzinba, then director of the Institute of Language, Literature and History in Sokhumi stated that "extremist forces" (Georgian nationalists) were concentrating resources to "stir up conflict" and then blame the Abkhaz for it (quoted in Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989: 81).

In a certain way, this discourse was a watershed in relations between Sokhumi and Tbilisi regarding the re-vision of the constitutional provisions. If the Abkhaz asked for rights and an improved status, Georgian nationalists had interpreted the demands in the most extreme way when they called it a "slandorous and criminal statement" against the Georgian people (Bakradze in Hewitt, 2013: 62). By uttering those words, Bakradze securitized the issue, transforming the Abkhaz requests into full-fledged threats against the people of Georgia. It is hard to overstate the contribution of this narrative, and it also helps to measure the direction and quality of ideas nurtured by the politics of the time. In his address to the Congress of the Soviet Deputies, Valdislav Ardzinba accused Georgian intellectuals of attempting to blame the Abkhaz petition for causing the tragedy in April, but he insisted that the goals of the Likhny declaration were different from those of nationalists and joined the Georgian delegation in demanding the full investigation⁷⁸ of the April tragedy (quoted in Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989: 81).

⁷⁸ Georgian deputies of the Soviet Congress demanded the high-profile commission to investigate the causes of the April tragedy. Gorbachev supported them, and the fact-finding commission was established.

A few days later, Merab Kostava went to Abkhazia and addressed ethnic Georgians, indicating that they were “core-inhabitants” of the territory and the “separatists” who wished to split Georgia and Abkhazia were “traitors to united Georgia” (Hewitt, 2013: 63).⁷⁹ Such radical statements had closed the space for alternative views, thus legitimising the breaking of rules and dehumanisation of an adversary. Going further, Kostava attacked Kosntantin Ozgan for his Turkish origin and declared that: “we are constructing a black day for the little group of Abkhazian separatists!... We will teach the Abkhazians sense and reason!!!” (quoted in Hewitt, 2013: 63). This was the linguistic market of the time, as political actors formed through performatives an age of extremes to divide a society (Lefort ch.3), and seek to dehumanise with labels e.g. “criminals”, “separatists”, “extremists” or “traitors”.

In light of the escalation, there are several newspaper articles and essays that acquired importance because of their aggressive tone or the authors’ background. The next section will feature some extracts and examples of the Georgian-Abkhaz discourse.

6.8. In search of the truth – Voices from Tbilisi

The Public in Tbilisi listened to Abkhaz through the prism of leaders of nationalistic movements. The Communist government completely lost the trust of the people by April 1989, and nationalists claimed a huge influence on public opinion. The leaders of the opposition were holding daily meetings in Rustaveli Avenue and were

⁷⁹ Treason, treachery, and traitors were the favourite words of nationalist leaders; these words were the symbolic capital that helped then to mobilize the masses for extreme measures and protest (author’s observations).

informing the public. They called it a “sainpormatsio mitingi” (an informational meeting).⁸⁰ The Georgian press and media engaged in the battle for truth too, by allocating space to voices of nationalism and homogeneity. The most significant and in-depth answer to the Abkhaz accusations was the essay “Truth about Abkhazia” by Guram Panjikidze, a renowned Georgian writer (Roman Miminoshvili a co-author) (see Hewitt, 1993: 284). The essay is an analysis of the bilateral relations and represents the attitude of part of Georgian society toward Abkhazia. There is a reason for such a detailed analysis of the publication as it encompasses every point in the bilateral discourse. In so doing, one can envisage the lines of discontent that draw communities apart. A rather longer piece embodies all the allegations discussed among Georgians and printed in the press. Their essay could be seen as a symbol of the epistemic crisis (or the crisis of modernity) Georgia went through the late 1980s. George Hewitt branded the piece as an “admixture of arrogance, irony, aprioristic argumentation, avoidance of the issues and the inevitable downright abuse” (1993: 283). Both statements and comparisons demonstrate how the past and certain prejudices dominated discourse about the ethnic minorities. It helps to recapture the meaning of the concepts, such as ‘nation’ and ‘ethnic minority’, that determined the future of South Caucasian alignments. Published in November 1989, shortly after the deadly clashes in July in Sokhumi, the long article has crystallised position held by the Georgian intelligentsia about the *Letter of Abkhaz*. It offers a mixture of condemnations, allegations, irony, proclamations, trenchancy and unconfirmed facts.

⁸⁰ This was an alternative broadcasting tool, as the Soviet media had lost credibility by that time.

The essay opens with a strong condemnation of 15 July 1989, the day when first deadly clashes happened in Sokhumi. Applying framing, one can define the language and words that built the public “perspective” about the disagreement. Guram Panjikidze and Roman Miminoshvili brand Abkhaz being extremist. An “extremist is an extremist”,⁸¹ they note, but question the behaviour of Abkhaz doctors who denied medical assistance to ethnic Georgians (1990: 92). “What caused these events? What caused the frenzy of these extremists? Was the Sokhumi massacre a demonstration of an unintended fury or was it caused by the launch of the Sokhumi branch of the Tbilisi State University?” — so asked the authors (1990: 92). Asserting that the incident was a very well-planned action against the Abkhaz nation, the Georgian writers thought that it was managed and almost openly supported by the party workers, writers, scholars and other representatives of intelligentsia (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 92). The comments are full of words of pity toward the Abkhaz people, who will have to carry the burden of that “shameful” day, shame that is impossible (the Georgian word for ‘never’ is used) to remove from history (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 92).

The authors contradict the Abkhaz accusations of Georgian colonial approaches, referring to the data that demonstrates that they were a minority who were enjoying privileges of majority. “Abkhaz (Apsua⁸²) are 17.1 per cent of the population according to the 1979 survey, Georgians 43.9, Russians 16.4 and Armenians 15.1” (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 93). By showing the data, Panjikidze and Miminoshvili intend to demonstrate the multiple privileges granted to

⁸¹ They use this word knowing that Abkhaz did not like that particular label used by Gamsakhurdia

⁸² Apsua also was used by Gamsakhurdia to alienate Abkhaz and emphasize their otherness.

Abkhazians (see Slider, 1985), which are given to them on the “Georgian soil” for the price of “oppression and limitation” of Georgians (1990: 93). Their intention is to fully depict and illustrate “who oppresses whom?”, which was the existential question of the time between two groups. It is noteworthy that the authors use the word “oppress” in a sarcastic tone after each point: “Look, how we Georgians oppress the Abkhaz” (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 94). This reference to statistics demonstrates that the authors assign their own categories to the aim as they create a hierarchy of things (ch.3). They examine the factors of power that measure the problem in a particular way, which is offered by them. In other words, Panjikidze and Miminoshvili list the paradigms that they consider significant in measuring Abkhaz representation. As already mentioned in chapter 3, this is an example of an ideological and cultural context of speech acts that were prevalent at the time.

Another example of using the historic context as a tool was the Abkhaz claim that the government of Soviet Georgia was heading toward genocide of Abkhaz people, because they were following the footsteps of Stalin and Beria (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 103). Stanislav Lakoba argues that Georgianization policies were an attempt of genocide against Abkhaz, which was conducted by Georgians when they purposefully destroyed historical and cultural monuments (1995: 101). Both sides of the conflict used the *Genocide* word before and during the war as well as after the armed conflict. Some Georgian politicians (e.g. Tamaz Nadareishvili) did argue that eviction of more than 200 000 ethnic Georgians was a genocide. Georgians do accuse the Abkhaz of destroying Georgian monuments in Abkhazia and consider that as an act of genocide too. This very specific norm of international

humanitarian law was widely abused by everybody in the conflicts across the region. Genocide is a very powerful word in international humanitarian law, and it was useful for the politicians to exploit the norm. One could suggest that the concept of genocide serves as a strategic weapon in the quest for independence as it mostly damages such aspirations, further complicating conflict resolution (Grodsky, 2012: 2).

If one applies the method of framing (ch. 3) then one can see how the issue of language was put into the spotlight. Abkhaz claim that they were forcefully exposed to the Georgian language whilst they wished to speak Russian. The answer to the language issue is ironic for the Abkhaz, as Georgian authors explain that it was Georgian side who added the Abkhaz language to the Constitution of Abkhazian Autonomous Republic to protect the endangered language. The Abkhaz accuse not only the Georgian government but the Church as well in forcing the Abkhaz diocese to attend Georgian liturgy rather than Russian (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 107). Georgian writers mock the Abkhaz in this section as they explain that the Russian liturgy means Clerical Slavic, which is difficult to understand even for native Russian speakers (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 108). As Nodia stresses in one of his essays, Georgians defined their country as part of “high culture”, in other words the space where Georgian was the language of literacy and elite culture (1998: 16). It must be noted that the idea of “high culture” might have guided the authors when they mocked Abkhaz.

Panjikidze and Miminoshvili stress the aspirations of Abkhaz toward Russia and ironically regret the fact that the Abkhaz language is “unfortunately still part of the Iberian-Caucasian family” and could not join the Slavic group yet (1990: 127). The

Georgian writers accuse the Abkhaz in being Russia-focused. They argue that Russian colonial rulers had been pursuing policies of segregation aimed to destroy Georgia. It was their aim to assimilate Abkhaz with Russians and substituted Georgian language with Russian (1990: 129). They strongly support the viewpoint that Georgians had always protected Abkhaz from Russification and that now it is branded as a 'crime' (1990: 160). The word "crime" of Georgians was prevalent in the public discourse. Many thought that Georgians were unfaithfully treated hosts of Abkhaz guests who abused Georgian hospitality and demanded independence. This was the most vivid observation of those years, and in particular the idea of "guests" was popularised by Gamsakhurdia and his followers. Highlighting this word made the Georgians feel as though they were victims of a conspiracy of the Abkhaz and Russians and was a good tool for the mobilization of public opinion against non-Georgians overall. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, talking victimhood is an attempt to establish a new reality, and it helps the speech act to succeed (see Jeffery and Candea, 2006).

There is another example of the application of a justificatory strategy (see ch.3), when the authors of the essay underline the language and ask generally that, if the Abkhaz were powerful and independent, then why they did not have own alphabet and literature (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 129). Georgians always boast of having an ancient alphabet and literary legacy dating back to the fifth century. The authors are inquiring why the Abkhaz "could not" write a book or translate the gospel (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 129). They also refer to the founder of the Abkhaz alphabet, who was "buried the day before yesterday" (probably they mean Baron von Uslar or Dimitri Gulia). It is understandable that the

writers were furious about the allegations made in Abkhaz letters, yet the emphasis on language is symbolic since it accomplishes an achievable aim: it links political claims of ownership with the psychological demands for the affirmation of a value of a group (Horowitz, 1985: 222). Needless to say, that the authors use language as an instrument of self-respect and dignity vis-à-vis the Abkhaz; because the Abkhaz language is not as old as Georgian. Such an ironic attitude supports the reproduction of identities, i.e. the Georgian identity looks stronger and older than that of the Abkhaz.

The Georgian intelligentsia always thought that the Abkhaz (and to more extent the Ossetians) did not have enough intellectual resources to fight the historical or ideological warfare with Georgian scholars and historians. But looking at both sides and arguments demonstrates that the hierarchical academic inheritance of the USSR was limiting both parties, and this is apparent in the discourse and language used in the arguments against each other. The past, which was mostly written from a political point of view of few Communists and censored during seventy years of the Soviet rule, was becoming an instrument for the solidification of new nations, and this very fact demonstrates the weakness of both scholarly groups. The escalation of the conflict and its political outcomes vividly demonstrates the failure of scholars and historians to prevent the “historical engineering” of the future and the change in the channels of communication (Mamardashvili interview).⁸³ Mamardashvili openly criticized Georgian nationalism, and he was announced to be “a traitor of Georgia” (Shatirishvili, 2009: 397, see also

⁸³ Mamardashvili, M. 1990. Interview. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sa44jqap_s [Last Accessed: 3 August 2018]

Coppieters, 2002: 98). Again, this is an example of a strategic application of ideology and cultural context, signified and emphasized for a particular purpose. There was a mainstream thinking that the Abkhaz and Ossetians lacked resources and any challenger was branded as a “traitor”. Reading the language of the argument one can see the “mode” of operationalization of the issue (ch.3).

The essay continues to address almost all historic issues including the confusion about Abkhaz identity. Panjikidze and Miminoshvili name the Abkhaz identity issue as “extremely important” (1990: 168), but was it that important? “Historic Abkhaz and modern Apsua” they claimed were totally different people. The origin of Abkhaz and their affiliation to the territory of Abkhazia was and remains a significant part of historic discourse. Georgians and Abkhazians accused each other of incorrectly interpreting words and the names of places, churches and towns (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 185). The authors emphasize that autonomy was the highest possible privilege granted to the Abkhaz, and they had to be satisfied with that status (1990: 186). Panjikidze and Miminoshvili note that the short independence of Abkhazia was a “mistake” that produced negative outcomes (1990: 186). They affirm their position on the same page that “Abkhazia was and will always remain part of Georgia” (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 186).

After enumerating these examples, they talk about the benefits and privileges Abkhaz gained in modern times (i.e. 1970s-80s), which made some “faint-hearted” (sic.) Georgians become Abkhaz (1990: 136). Abkhazia, as a small nation, was granted some privileges and some ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia choose to be registered as Abkhaz in the passports. Panjikidze and Miminoshvili refer to this fact several times and mention exemptions granted to Abkhaz from military service

during the Tsarist period adding that such policies caused the increase in the number of the Abkhaz population and that in fact there was no significant change (1990: 151). The adjective to describe those Georgians was offensive for both nations. The authors implied that bad Georgians wished to become Abkhaz, somehow meaning that the Abkhaz were a second-class people. Georgians who chose Abkhaz ethnicity were bad citizens. Such an interpretation of people's choices did not bring any positive trends to the complex political disputes between Georgia and Abkhazia, or to be more specific, between Tbilisi and Sokhumi. These adjectives had accumulated into instruments of radicalization and mobilization against one another. This is an example of the operationalization of ethnic belonging for a political end.

This piece is noteworthy as it depicts the operationalization of history in Abkhaz-Georgian discourse. Featuring the argument about titles of the kings of Georgia and their relation to the origins of the Georgian or Abkhaz Kingdom demonstrate how history is put into a "mode" that "creates the truth" and appeals to emotions and instincts across communities (ch.3). Georgian historiography considers Abkhazia and Georgia to be the same and thus strongly disagrees (see Lortkipanidze, 1990) with the Abkhaz argument for independence. Stuart Kaufman calls it a "bogus theory" that was proposed in Stalin's time, when the ancient Abkhaz were considered Georgians and contemporary residents, the North Caucasians, arrived in the seventeenth century (2001: 92). The most striking part of this discourse is the structure of the argument. Both parties refer to medieval or modern historians but never question the validity of historic 'facts'. Historiography is used as scientific evidence of territorial or state belonging. The argument concerns events dating back to the eighth century, to the Abkhaz King Leon II and his legacy. Georgian

historiography argues that Leon II consolidated the territory of what is Western Georgia today, whereas Abkhaz historians and the Letter of Likhny as well define the same facts differently. They say that Leon II incorporated (or annexed) parts of Western Georgia into the Abkhaz Kingdom (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 117). The general history books always implied that the consolidation of power in Western Georgia was an arrangement between the ruling families of the Kartvelian (Kartli) kingdoms (see Kaufman, 2001: 92, Lortkipanidze, 1990: 64). Leon II was probably a good negotiator and he gained the title of a King. The title of the Georgian monarchs was “A king [the queen was also referred as king] of Abkhaz, Kartvels, Rans and Kakhs” (the names are not in alphabetical order, they are arranged from West to East). The details of the distribution of power during Leon II and the title of monarchs are a very important part of the discussion. There are few examples of other regal titles that are ordered according to the significance of a province or a territory. Accordingly, Georgian historians think and argue that Abkhazia and Georgia (Saqartvelo) are synonyms and the name differences could not be used as a justification of the claim for independence. This is the regime of truth they wished to impose on society, which later on ended up in flames and alienated parts of the country. Yet one has to remember that the language, and any language, underwent huge modernization and transformation over time. It is a difficult work and painstaking research efforts that makes it possible to translate the words across centuries. It is particularly challenging in the South Caucasus, which lacks archival material that dates back to the first millennium.

By challenging the authenticity of the history of “free” or “sovereign” Abkhazia, which they define as a “myth”(1990: 124), the writers engage in an act of

creating the truth by questioning the “proofs” and “myths” used by Abkhaz. Yet, one has to remember that “proofs” in the Soviet historiography could be problematic as it was mentioned in the Chapter 4 the history of the USSR was totally redefined by Bolsheviks (see Geller and Nekrich). Besides, there are two points worth of attention. First, the idea of sovereignty is very fluid. Sovereignty in its Westphalian understanding did not apply to the kingdoms of the South Caucasus, as they did not participate in European power wars. They were on the edge of the continent and had a customary approach to power distribution among the princedoms. This indicates that both the Abkhaz and Georgians were misleading their audiences about sovereignty and independence in their consequent pledges. They wished to legitimize their claims, which were based on not quite legitimate arguments. Another significant point is the definition of history for the parties. When Panjikidze and Miminoshvili say that the history promoted by Abkhaz is a myth, they forget to suggest that perhaps Georgian history is the product of the same myth as well. The Communist regime always exploited all available means for the propaganda of their ideas and values and history was one of their favourites. The discourse in this case is an exemplary demonstration of misconceptions and the misinterpretation of the past.

The rest of the essay is a position of part of Georgian society about the status and history of Abkhazia and Georgia as well as the status of history in the present. This is a story of mutual accusations and the radical evaluation of the critical situation. The crisis was foreseeable as the old regime was collapsing and new arrangements were necessary to adjust to a new world. Yet the parties, as the discourse demonstrates, had chosen the past to be the guiding tool for building the

future. The past was and still remains controversial because of the political interests of the Soviet leaders in the 1920s and 1930s. This is possibly the reason for so many misconceptions about the conflict. The past was instrumental for getting public mobilized and securitized, whilst it guided the arguments that were purely political and could have been solved through a constructive dialogue. In an interview, former Prime Minister of Georgia Tengiz Sigua talks about the methods that the Moscow establishment designed to retain control over the collapsing union. He argues that he saw a secret document that was commissioned to the Institute of Ethnography directed by Professor Bromley (see Chapter 4) and aimed at proposing consequent tools that the Kremlin could use to compartmentalize and rule the prospective former republics (Sigua, 2013). He outlines two main paradigms that the Institute offered to the government: the first one was the so called “inter-fronts” — the groups embedded within big factories or institutes who were mostly representatives of ethnic minorities and who triggered discontent among the staff. Sigua argues that the idea of “inter-fronts” was not effective in Georgia, however, the second proposal, to instrumentalise and weaponize the autonomous status against the central governments in the republics, ended up to be more fruitful in case of Georgia (Sigua, 2013).

Overall, the essay ends up being judgmental, claiming that almost all the Abkhaz arguments were absurd and that all arguments and assumptions of Georgian scholars represented the complete truth. In the final part they ironically refer to the first Abkhazian book that was published only in 1912 and “was not culturally or intellectually distinguishable” (Panjikidze and Miminoshvili, 1990: 193). Indeed, the Georgian language is old, as was the literature, but still such irony did not add

anything particular to the fame of the Georgian literary tradition. Contrarily, it depicted Georgian writers as cynical intellectuals who drafted a long essay to indicate that Abkhaz literature was too young, and its history was incorrect.

There is ample evidence in the letter that the Georgian elite was not ready for a compromise regarding the new terms and conditions of the relationships, which in turn made the ethnic minorities (Abkhaz and Ossetians) alien to the new state that Georgia was aiming to build. There was no sense of “belonging” (Shotter, 1993: 163), but a sense of being inadequate in relation to a larger community with an unconditional membership, i.e. the Georgians. Needless to say that in any society there must be a “competing and conflicting” life with associated “language games”,⁸⁴ but it should not make any member an “intrusive alien” whose worth to the community is being constantly questioned (Shotter, 1993: 163). To put it into context, one could be alienated by the lexicon which excludes a significant segment of the population. By doing so, they halted the process of social relations (in the Aristotelian sense), because if peoples’ identities are a function and a result of their social relations, then they must maintain their identities, which is the ontological security of their social being, and everyone must morally respect and sustain identities around them in order for these identities to sustain social relations (Shotter, 1993: 164). The hostile dominant narrative deprived parties of the chance to listen each other’s ideas and accommodate differences. Almost all words selected by disputing parties signified a rift and discord that it had predetermined their

⁸⁴ This is Wittgenstein’s concept, when he argues that people react to certain things within the boundaries of *their* language (see Wittgenstein 2009: no. 60 and 130)

application to that particular conflict (Wittgenstein, 2009: no. 264). The articulations were bearers of negative signifiers that shaped the dimension of the conflict.

The Abkhaz discourse was radicalised by the either-or choice between Russia and Georgia. Somehow the initiators of the project thought that they had to make a drama out of the political issue. The very idea of total radicalisation is striking as it was widespread. The political actors did not have the time and, perhaps, resources to organize a long-term transformation or channel the differences through diversified avenues. It was an unfortunate choice of the illiberal and oppressed individuals of the USSR. Most of them got the opportunity to acquire power in a post-Soviet political quagmire and they succeeded in finding an audience and legitimising a plainly illegitimate discourse of hatred and enmity.

The Abkhaz saw the solution in appealing directly to Moscow to become a union republic. They felt Georgia was unable to provide the level and quality of autonomy they wished to possess. Both Slider and Hewitt note that the reforms undertaken after the 1978 demands by the Soviet administration in Tbilisi did not have sufficient impact (Hewitt, 1993, Slider, 1985). One could argue that the Soviet system was experiencing pitfalls as it was unable to develop and catch up with modernity. As it has been said, in the previous chapters (see Chernayev) the system was in crisis and Perestroika was an attempt to save it. In other words, the inefficient system was unlikely to produce adequate outcomes for Abkhaz. Despite being a superpower of the time, the USSR did not have the strength to preserve the essentials of its structure and was incapable of change in the wider selection of its aspects (Deutsch, 1966: 82). To further elaborate, the state did not have a learning capacity that would allow it to reallocate or recommit a large part of resources to

new uses without destroying the organization as a whole (Deutsch, 1966: 82). Yet, the change of the regime and the collapse of the USSR was a completely new opportunity for the two sides to negotiate a better relationship and accommodate Abkhaz needs. However, the radical securitization of Abkhaz and their voices in Tbilisi had blocked the avenues of communication as they revoked only the negative institutional memory across the polities.

There are inaccuracies in arguments of the both sides, but history is power in the discourse and thus gains vast importance. The word “historic” or “historically” dominated the discussion, and the parties tried to prove that what they know from the history is the truth. As all over Europe there were small princedoms on the modern Georgian territory. There were some alliances or separations. During the pre-war discourse in the 1980s, the history of Abkhaz and Georgian relations was a very popular discussion topic. Everybody knew at least something about the ‘truth’. The newspapers published various letters and historic essays about the sense of belonging of Abkhazia. The same occurred in Abkhazia. Instead of addressing actual political problems that faced the parties, history and ethnic identity became the item on the agenda.

The multiple articles and open letters in leading Georgian newspapers shaped the public discourse. The Tbilisi society questioned the right of the Abkhaz to live in Georgia. Radical chauvinism became popular as many renowned writers, artists and public figures supported right-wing ideas. Georgia was depicted as a privileged nation and all other ethnicities had to accept the reality or leave. The issue of Georgian nationalism was the most popular topic of discussion and those who spoke up against it were considered enemies of the nation or spies of the Kremlin. Zviad

Gamsakhurdia's political allies particularly supported this stance. Radical voices overtook the moderate intellectuals and as a result the campaign expanded (Kaufman, 2001: 112). As already mentioned, the Abkhaz as well as the Ossetians became "existentially different and alien" (Schmitt and Strong, 2007). It was acceptable to demand loyalty toward the Georgian people and ask the "aliens" to subscribe to the terms and conditions offered by the Georgian nation.

There were dissenting voices among the Georgian intelligentsia; however, the nationalist leaders trumped them by mobilizing supporters. In extreme circumstances, people tend to listen to radicals rather than moderates. A philologist, Tengiz Buachidze, appealed to the nationalists and called for common sense. He published an appeal in the *Literaturuli Saqartvelo* newspaper in December 1988, and he argued that the number of radicals was relatively small and civil society was bigger; however, the society expected the government to manage the crisis (Buachidze, 1988). Referring to the partly submissive attitude of a society, he hails part of the intelligentsia who understand the risks of radical discourse that is dangerous for Georgia; he urges for negotiations and insists that Perestroika and Glasnost should be used positively for the future of the country (Buachidze, 1988). Yet compared to moderate voices the performatives uttered by nationalists were more powerful and had more profound and far-reaching appeal. The ideology of the nationalists made people forget that their world was constructed and the ideology of nationalism seemed to be a natural world for them (Billig, 1995: 37). In other words, the reference to fears and threats ended up being a more efficient instrument of mobilization than a call to rethink historic facts. The regime of truth based on hostile assumptions was already set up by radical nationalists.

Another Georgian scholar and historian, Nodar Lomouri, proposed to re-think the term “Abkhaz” and end the long debate about the historical and linguistic misconceptions related to the issue. Writing for the *Literaturuli Saqartvelo* newspaper, he argues that the understanding of the language and terms should be amended as they largely refer to dubious sources. By declining to engage in the debate, he emphasizes the banality of deliberation that was underway in Georgia about the history and origin of the Abkhaz in particular (Lomouri). Lomouri candidly argues that all the chroniclers and sources used to support the parties of the debate were very “political” writings, even those produced by Greek geographers and scholars, who used ethnonyms as political terms rather than in relations to ethnic groups. Hence it was challenging, if not impossible, to get a full picture of the ethnic belonging of old Kolkhida (Lomouri). Lomouri admits that the answer to the dialectical question between Georgians and the Abkhaz, as to why the Georgian kings had “Abkhaz” in their title, is simply unknown because historians did not know the ethnic origin of the first Abkhaz nobleman who was at the same time founder of the united Georgian Kingdom [Bagrat III]. By dropping the ethnic variable, Lomouri offers to concentrate on political legacy of Abkhaz princes and look into the shared heritage of Georgians and Abkhaz (Lomouri, 1989). He also explains that the ethnonyms in the past were used differently and their literal translation to modern times was an inaccuracy, if not a mistake (Lomouri, 1989). Citing many inconsistencies and grey areas in the history, Lomouri argues that such a dogmatization of the past damages the discourse and insists that further research has to be conducted before any of the arguments are confirmed (1989). Yet Lomouri’s opinion was less vocal, because he represented the moderate part of the intelligentsia. In turbulent times, nationalism was a “psychological” phenomenon

and the public preferred to listen to radicals (Billig, 1995: 44). As mentioned earlier in chapter 3, in crisis situations language has a formative power due to “extraordinary” discourse, which dominates the events (see Bourdieu ch.3). Suffice to say, that the discourse was extraordinary, which gave the advantage to radicals.

Consequently, the language games and superlative adjectives applied to the vastly unknown past became decisive denominators of the political crisis over the legal status of the units of the former USSR. The debate, launched by historians and intellectuals, had implied an exercise of historic amnesia when ideologically convenient stories were accepted as facts, while discomfiting parts of the story were overlooked and denied (Billig, 1995: 38).

6.9. Between Sokhumi and Tbilisi

Abkhaz voices

A Russian-language newspaper published by the National Forum of Abkhazia released an article about the “truth” of the founding of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic (AAR). Titled as *Pages of History*, the newspaper demonstrates special status of history. A column by the historian Badjgur Sagharia started with a reference to a telegram, addressed to comrades Lenin and Stalin on 26 March 1921. The telegram revealed the uneasy relationship between Tbilisi and Sokhumi during the independence years, from 1918-1921.⁸⁵ The Abkhazian side accused the Georgian Menshevik government of being “extremely chauvinistic” and appealed to Lenin and

⁸⁵ Edinenie, August 1991 (newspaper published in Sokhumi) p. 2

Stalin for protection. Ephrem Eshba, Nestor Lakoba and Nikoloz Akirtava⁸⁶ proposed that Abkhazia should become part of the Russian Federation, or else be an independent unit of the Union.⁸⁷ The same article provides a record of the phone conversation between comrades Eshba and Orjonikidze. They discuss the possibility of the secession of Abkhazia from Georgia. Eshba insisted that Abkhaz people do not want to be part of Georgia and that Orjonikidze has to acknowledge the fact. The significant point in the conversation is the reference to the “centre”.⁸⁸ The dialogue of two communists showed their dependence on the centre and total dominance of the central committee. The publication is significant as it demonstrates the role and status of this historic narrative in Georgian-Abkhaz discourse of the 1980s. Such references show the significance of the Bolshevik legacy and how the politics perceived change in the age of Perestroika. Despite the wide acceptance of the need to transform the USSR, discourse was still focused on the ideas of the 1920s.

On 21 May 1921, the *Revkom* of Georgia decided to accept the Declaration of Independence of the Socialist Republic of Abkhazia.⁸⁹ The forum of all the workers of Abkhazia had welcomed the declaration of the *Revkom* and voted for a resolution that contained the wording: “in order to avoid ethnic and national clashes between Georgians and Abkhaz the independence of Abkhazia was the right decision”.⁹⁰ However, the decision was temporary as Stalin revised it (see Hewitt, 1993)⁹¹. The author of the article blames Stalin for the union of Abkhazia and Georgia. Badjgur Sagharia outlines Stalin’s policies toward Abkhazia and his contribution to failed

⁸⁶ Abkhaz leaders in 1920s

⁸⁷ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁸⁸ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁸⁹ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁹⁰ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁹¹ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

independence. Stalin was Georgian, hence making him the key actor in failing in 1921 made Georgia an enemy. In this case, Stalin as well as Orjonikidze could be viewed as performatives that remind Abkhaz people that their rights were curtailed (Kaufman, 2001: 88-89) by two Georgian men.

Sagharia cited the Union Treaty signed between Abkhazia and Georgia in December 1921. The treaty was based on military, political and economic needs and enshrined good but equal relations of the two entities.⁹² Later on, the idea of a single South Caucasian Federation damaged Abkhaz interests according to Sagharia,⁹³ but the noteworthy point is a quotation from a resolution of 17 February 1922. In this resolution, the Revkom (Revolutionary Committee) of Abkhazia hailed the bilateral treaty between Georgia and Abkhazia, emphasizing the importance of eliminating “political mavericks” (i.e. Mensheviks). According to the document Mensheviks were accused of stirring up ethnic tensions.⁹⁴

The Abkhaz authorities attempted and actively worked to obtain direct membership of the Federation, although they were allowed to join it only through a treaty agreement with Georgia. The dilemma in the evaluation and analysis of the conflict and war for Abkhazia is the clash of *truths* that are different for all sides. When the argument about the status of Abkhazia was raised in the 1980s, the parties and political groups chose to use certain extracts from distorted information they possessed from heavily censored books or research papers. Sagharia argues that according to the documents the Menshevik government of Georgia left national-

⁹² Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁹³ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁹⁴ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

chauvinism as its key legacy, which promoted an antagonistic attitude toward everything Georgian.⁹⁵

Sagharia argues that the union treaty was the main document between Georgia and Abkhazia, and that Stalin later devised constitutional changes that downgraded Abkhazia's status.⁹⁶ There is a pattern of Bolsheviks accusing Mensheviks and the Abkhaz polity accusing Bolsheviks, and Stalin in particular, of constitutional and legal arguments between the two entities (see Hewitt, 1993). It ended up as a blame game that involved the past, institutions that were obsolete or no longer existed. Neither of the parties showed the will to overcome the past and outline the framework for talks over the future. The row over the status and power distribution became the essential hindrance. At the same time, the parties did not work to cooperate on a settlement; on the contrary, they escalated the conflict and brought the country to the brink of war.

Most voices were assessing one part of the story, either negatively or positively, but almost nobody was able to offer an alternative or to soften nationalistic sentiments. It was in vogue to criticize Communists and cultivate national identity, though many had forgotten that that national identity, which was so harshly disputed, was the product of millennia of multicultural interactions. In fact, Sagharia notes in the article that Georgia had somehow forgotten its own history of being a multinational and multi-ethnic country, that the "one and undivided" Georgia was a rather imperialistic vision of the world.⁹⁷ One must mention here Andrei Sakharov's argument about Georgia being a "little empire",

⁹⁵ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁹⁶ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

⁹⁷ Edinenie, August 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

when he proposed a confederation, in which all the units of the USSR including the autonomous republics and okrugs or oblasts can enjoy the widest possible “sovereignty” with some restrictions in security, foreign relations, transport and etc. (Sakharov, 1989: 26). He insisted that such “de-imperializing” (decolonisation) of the USSR was the only way to deal with “small empires” i.e. the republics of the Union (Sakharov, 1989: 27). Whilst arguing for the case, he referred to Georgia as an example of a “small empire” which had three autonomous entities (1989: 27). By proposing to start with Georgia (and its decolonization) and then continuing with the Russian Federation (Sakharov, 1989: 27) he prompted huge outrage in Georgia. Sakharov’s comments about Georgia had been interpreted as unfriendly, and added up to fear for the Georgian identity, as Sakharov noted as Russian empire once curtailed Georgia’s aspirations now Georgians were suppressing minorities in a similar way (Smith et al., 1998: 172). Hence, Sagharia referring to the same terminology pronounced a performative that threatened Georgians.

A further example of the continued attempts to shape the discourse is a piece from the *Edinenie*, a Russian-language Abkhaz newspaper from July 1990, which published a letter by Zurab Achba, a deputy chairman of the National Forum of Abkhazia “Aidgilara”. He criticized the statement of the Abkhazian branch of the National Front of Georgia in the newspaper *Sabchota Abkhazeti* (Soviet Abkhazia).⁹⁸ Achba agreed with the authors that Abkhazia faced a “conflict situation”, but noted that the situation could not change unless the “objective causes” of the problem were addressed by the government of Georgia along with the leaders of social

⁹⁸ *Edinenie*, July 1990, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

(public) movements.⁹⁹ One can see the antagonistic language, similar to voices from Tbilisi, talking about the conflict and disputes. When one analyses the context and rhetoric of the conflict, one can see the accumulation of negative perceptions that dominated the political lexicon of the time. Notably, the radical discourse about the future allocation of power between Tbilisi and Sokhumi was in fact obstructing constructive discussions that could lead to an agreement. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the parties was their inability to delineate the existing dilemmas and listen to each other, instead of referring to historic myths.

Furthermore, the choice of topics makes speech acts radical and engages in building new truth. Achba denied the claim that the Georgian language had been banned in Abkhazia and that people were punished for being Georgian (the report in *Newsweek* describes how such rumours spread in Tbilisi). Using framing, one can notice keywords, e.g. “incorrect” or “provocateurs”, along which the discourse is constructed. Achba considers “incorrect” to equate the Abkhaz people with a “bunch of provocateurs”; though he admits that Abkhazians were used to harsh treatment for more than 150 years including attempts to annihilate them, their language and make them extinct (see Hewitt, 1993).¹⁰⁰ His point could be linked to the statement made by Giorgi Karkarashvili (a Georgian general), which was and continues to be one of the most hostile speech acts in Abkhaz-Georgian saga.

One can see the metrics that were used by the political actors to secure support for their truth. The letter demonstrates the antagonism and enmity that was built up through words and actions of political actors of two separate nationalist

⁹⁹ Edinenie, July 1990, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

¹⁰⁰ Edinenie, July 1990, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 2

movements. Achba places emphasis on the historic trauma of Mohajirs and addresses the tragedy of the Abkhaz people, who were consistently suppressed for more than 150 years. He attempts to create the image of a martyr nation that has no choice but to fight. In other words, Achba use the idea of victimhood as well. Apparently, such evaluations served as performatives that mobilized the Abkhaz against Georgians. The language of the letter was preparing the public for the worst-case scenario, as it described the “historic” destiny to be persecuted. Subsequently, the nation that was denied its basic right to exist and self-determine has no other choice than to continue to fight for freedom. Like the Georgian nationalists, the Abkhaz were seeking legitimacy as they prepared the nation for a “historic” shift.

The same newspaper (*Edinenie*) published a piece featuring relations between Georgia and Abkhazia in 1918-1921, entitled “*The Struggle between the Mensheviks and the Abkhaz National Council*”. The very title of the piece is hostile and has a mobilising power, given the fact that Georgians are ‘others’, although ‘Mensheviks’ is the term used in the headline. Notably, this Abkhaz newspaper emphasizes that the Mensheviks had an important role in the development of political tensions between two entities. The policies and methods used by the Mensheviks were and remain largely unacceptable for Abkhaz people and have a very negative institutional memory.¹⁰¹ One of the main reasons of mistrust is the first Menshevik constitution of 1921, which did not include status of Abkhazia, because of tensions between the administrations in Tbilisi and Sokhumi.

¹⁰¹ The Mensheviks had very tensed relations with the Abkhaz political elite. The Abkhaz thought that the Mensheviks had deceived them during the period of independent Georgia. When promised devolution and autonomy, they did not receive the actual rights (see Avalishvili 1940).

The Struggle between the Mensheviks and the Abkhaz National Council

contains an extract from the memoirs of an Abkhaz public figure and writer, Semen Ashkhvatsava, who was murdered in 1937. According to Ashkhvatsava, participants of a meeting of the Abkhaz National Council in 1918 addressed the reasons behind the political problems with the Menshevik government. The latter (the Mensheviks) had dissolved the local council, which was seen as an attempt to seize power in Abkhazia. However, delegates noted the fact that it was a coup orchestrated by “a group of persons”¹⁰² who wished to rule the country led by partisan interests. The document highlights the extremely hostile relations between Abkhaz leaders and Mensheviks in Tbilisi at the time. It is worth noting that the extract uses the word “Mensheviks” rather than Georgians. Perhaps this is an indication that the argument was not against the Georgian nation but a group of politicians who pursued own interests. The Abkhaz accused the Mensheviks of being untrustworthy during negotiations. Ashkhvatsava claimed that the Mensheviks always used force and terror as a last resort, being unable to implement other policies.

The headline of the article suggested that the struggle was against the Mensheviks, while “Abkhazia and Georgia” were only in small print. A careful analysis of the material shows that the Abkhaz community was against the Menshevik policies, which they saw were repeated by nationalists in Tbilisi. The extract shows that, in private conversations, Abkhaz leaders used the term “Mensheviks”, rather than “Georgians”. They perceived Mensheviks as a group of power-hungry people who refused any dialogue or compromise with other groups or republics between 1918 and 1921. During the 1980s the issue between Sokhumi and

¹⁰² Edinenie, February 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 3

Tbilisi was again the Menshevik approach to the status of Abkhazia. The news article shows the position of the Abkhaz community, which was against that old politics which saw events as a one-dimensional trajectory imposed from Tbilisi. If the Georgian polity had been able to change its attitude and position regarding Abkhazia's status, then they would have been open to a conversation with the Georgian state over the new status in the post-Soviet period. Instead, nationalist parties, thanks to their rhetoric and popularity, ignored the voices from autonomous entities.

In fact, Shakril's letter (see below) asks the question as to whether the freedom of one entity is possible by suppressing the choices of another. It might be considered that the wrong interpretation of freedom and independence was another hindrance between communities.

As this research project aims to show how the communication channels were misused or abused, it must point out the official formulation that Vladislav Ardzinba¹⁰³ presented to the Congress of the Soviet Deputies in May 1989. It seems that many units of the Soviet Union could not agree on the meaning of Perestroika, or what was the expected impact of the process. Ardzinba spoke about the faults in the Constitution, noting the hierarchy between the autonomous and union republics that led to "practical inequality", in the legal sphere in particular (quoted in Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989: 78). Grading nations by seniority was a product of Stalinism,

¹⁰³ The first president of Abkhazia, he was a director at the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History and the national deputy for Abkhazia

and Abkhazian dilemmas were the culmination of those ill-fated policies (in 1989: 78).

Another contribution to this hostile discourse is a lawyer, Georgy Kolbaya, who consider the consequences of the conflict in several different prisms.¹⁰⁴ The article addresses the historic motives of war and the aggression the Abkhaz felt from the Georgian “ruling elite”. Despite being critical, Kolbaya carefully separates Georgia’s political elite and argues that it was their idea to make Georgia a mono-ethnic country. Notably, Kolbaya repeats several times that Abkhazia was a multinational republic and that the Georgian elite aimed to occupy Abkhazia. Kolbaya uses word “genocide” in the text as well.¹⁰⁵ He claims that Georgians and Abkhaz have not shared a state for last 700 years and it was the Russian Empire that brought them into one space.¹⁰⁶ He argues that in the period of the USSR, Abkhazia was forced to become part of Georgia thanks to the policies of Stalin and Beria (see Nodia, 1997: 4). At the same time, Georgian authorities conducted ethnic engineering in the republic. Kolbaya argues that in the times of the Soviet rule, Abkhazia was exposed to terror and discrimination.

Kolbaya elaborates on the details of legal relations between Tbilisi and Sokhumi. He reminded the public that Georgia had boycotted the referendum of March 1991 on the subject of the future of the USSR, whereas Abkhazia participated in the vote and voted for the Union. In fact, Georgia held its own referendum and voted for independence from the USSR (31 March 1991). On 23 July 1992, the Abkhaz supreme council adopted the 1925 Constitution, which implied that Abkhazia

¹⁰⁴ Abkhazia, January 1995, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, pp.14-15

¹⁰⁵ Abkhazia, January 1995, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 14

¹⁰⁶ Georgian historiography prefers to ignore this fact

was an independent entity that had a treaty relationship with Georgia. The Georgian supreme council voted for the Constitution of 1921, which did not incorporate Abkhazia as a legal unit at all. Kolbaya thus argues that the Georgian political elite chose to exclude Abkhazia from its own legal system. Kolbaya argues that the union with Georgia was a “tragic” episode of Abkhaz history that brought repressions and war against non-Georgian residents. After the February Revolution in 1917, the Abkhaz formed the “Abkhaz People’s Council” and joined the North Caucasus Republic, hence when Georgia declared independence in 1917 Abkhazia was not part of Georgia (Cheterian, 2008: 69). They insist that it was only Stalin’s and Beria’s policies that downgraded Abkhazia from a union republic to an autonomous entity within Georgia in 1931 (Cheterian, 2008: 71). If one looks into the topic choice in the current discourse, one can notice the rhetoric about history and divisions. The text excludes commonalities, but it emphasizes only the differences between the two groups. Such a choice of topics helped the actors to build the truth they saw as appropriate.

Another exemplification of the tense discourse between Tbilisi and Sokhumi is an open letter to then chairman of the Supreme Council of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia by Tamara Shakril.¹⁰⁷ In this case it is noteworthy to look into the “mode” and “perspective” of the appeal as well as the context which she highlights. Shakril elaborates on the chauvinistic speeches and behaviour of Gamsakhurdia and accuses him of having “imperial ambitions” and “barbaric morality”. She quotes his words from an address to Central Committee of Georgia on 12 December 1990, when

¹⁰⁷ Edinenie, February 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 3

Gamsakhurdia threatened Ossetians: “I will bring an army of two thousand men and exterminate all Ossetians from the soil of Samachablo”.¹⁰⁸ Thus, one can see how Gamsakhurdia’s words were interpreted as speech acts by the Abkhaz. Gamsakhurdia thought that he “represented unity against the forces of separatism” but in fact it was an example of “simplification of political space” (Jones, 2013: 57). Instead of addressing the complexity of political and social relations he brought the “us versus them” dichotomy that actually ruined the ecosystem of society and inflicted a long-term trauma on societies including ethnic Georgians.

Shakril’s open letter is a noteworthy proof of controversies within Georgian society, and at the same time it is an expression of anger and empathy. The author condemned the policies and rhetoric of Gamsakhurdia and his inner circle, but simultaneously believed that there were “knights [people with dignity] in Georgia”. Further, Shakril noted that according to some of her acquaintances in Georgia who disagree with Gamsakhurdia, anti-Ossetian and anti-Abkhaz campaigns should be allocated more attention to solve the disagreements (see interview with an anonymous politician). Despite the attempts to widen the deliberation and bring more participants to the argument in Tbilisi, it was too late to limit nationalists and argue with their chauvinistic ideas.

The first part of the letter is aggressive and contains offensive words toward Georgia as a nation, and especially against Gamsakhurdia. She condemns Georgian imperialism and says they have Stalin’s genes and would like to conquer Russia and would not be against taking over the whole world. At the same time, she accused Gamsakhurdia of authoritarianism and dictatorship. Shakril denounced the tone

¹⁰⁸ Edinenie, February 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 3

used by Gamsakhurdia when he called on Ossetians and Abkhaz to be “satisfied by existing autonomous rights” or be prepared to lose them altogether. Shakril argues that the autonomy of Soviet origin was a scam and a purely symbolic practice, and not suitable for the new reality. There are several references to Charles De Gaulle, as Gamsakhurdia considered him to be an ideal politician and national leader. Shakril attempted to demonstrate the differences between Gamsakhurdia’s vision and the Gaullist approach to Algerian independence.

Shakril accuses the Tbilisi authorities of being controlled by Gamsakhurdia. She claims that the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia behaved recklessly in Sukhumi and narrowly escaped casualties. The author believes that the Georgian people deserve a better leader than Gamsakhurdia, whom she accused of “sacrilege”. Apparently, she had spoken to Georgians who never shared the nationalism propagated by Gamsakhurdia. She accuses him of coercing to suicide his own cousin from Gudauta (in Abkhazia), who, she argues, chose to die instead of being driven into violence. She mentions that Gamsakhurdia tried to convince “our Georgians” to act against the Abkhaz. “Our Georgians” were the Georgians who resided in Abkhazia and never shared the chauvinism and nationalism actively promoted by nationalist parties and their leaders in Tbilisi.

Shakril accuses Gamsakhurdia of organising the 9 April massacres.¹⁰⁹ She insisted that it was his “provocation” that forced the government to call for Central (Moscow government) assistance. The author expressed empathy toward the Georgian people but accused Gamsakhurdia of staging a “fake” funeral in Sokhumi.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Notably, many experts and witnesses of the event back in 1989 think that Gamsakhurdia did contribute to the tragedy.

¹¹⁰ Edinenie, February 1991, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 3

She also blamed him for an attempt to stir up a civil war in Georgia, referring to her “Georgian friends” and conversations with them.

It is worth mentioning that Shakril argues that Abkhazia and Ossetia were not parts of Georgia, and it was just a mere accident that they were included in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. She asks for a just consideration of the issue and argues that, if Georgia should be independent (she agrees with the point), then why should Abkhazia and Ossetia lack the opportunity of self-determination? Shakril assumes that Georgians did not have to sign the agreement with the “Centre” (i.e. Moscow) but at the same time Georgia had to avoid suppressing the smaller nations.

By examining the context and the language of Shakril’s points, one can see how the war of words produced the speech acts that had both intended and unintended consequences. Official statements addressed to South Ossetians were threatening the Abkhaz, and vice versa. Almost every word and fact as well as historic context was operationalised to fit into hostile mode of discourse.

There is another significant dispatch in *Edinenie* from February 1991: Democracy from a position of force.¹¹¹ Employing harsh and critical language, the new local government was represented in a negative scope as a tool of domination from Tbilisi. The article notes that the situation in Abkhazia was calm compared to that of in South Ossetia, though a prefecture does not help confidence-building. The appointment of a prefect (a head of local administration)¹¹² was defined as “illegal”. The Abkhaz were unhappy about a prefect appointed by the central government, and defined the fact as an attempt to revive Zhordanian-Berian-Stalinian ambitions in

¹¹¹ Lakoba, J. 1991. *Edinenie*, February, Sokhumi, Abkhaz ASSR, p. 1

¹¹² Prefect was a new position installed by Gamsakhurdia to improve local governance

Georgia. These three men were (and still remain) deeply associated with the suppression of the Abkhaz in the early twentieth century. Hence, in this case, their association with the existing regime is a performative act that allocates special meaning to the bilateral relations. The Abkhaz considered the Menshevik government of the short-lived Democratic Republic of Georgia to be the first upholder of their rights. Stalin and Beria had followed their footsteps and as Abkhaz believe further deprived them of a right to exist as a small nation. Jakob Lakoba names Gamsakhurdia as an heir of those ill-remembered policies. Therefore, an administrative appointment was interpreted in a deeply political and historical context, accentuating the negative institutional memory of Abkhazia. This appointment was securitized by the interpretation of speech acts and the historic context. The particular direction given to every decision contributed to a soaring alienation between the Tbilisi government and the autonomous republic. Divisive discourse fragmented communities who were struggling to overcome Soviet isolation and the Bolshevik perception of the world. These communities were not ready to face the anarchical world order after living under a strictly hierarchical totalitarian regime. At the same time, deeply fragmented and hostile discourse was beneficial politically. Emphasizing or inventing the connection of current decisions with a violent past was a powerful mobilization tool for the Abkhaz political actors on their way to post-Soviet power distribution. Simultaneously, political parties in Tbilisi had a plausible agenda which enabled them to avoid questions about the political and economic future of a soon to be an independent state.

6.10. Georgia for Georgians/Georgia – “a martyr nation”

As nationalism became a signpost of post-Soviet Georgia, the narrative against the Ossetians was heard by all minorities across the country (see English, 2008: 23). It was a conflict that defined the framework of how the Georgian authorities intended to deal with minority autonomies during and after the collapse of the USSR. It helped to build a stereotype that damaged Georgia and inter-ethnic relations in the country. By 1989 a Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia was torn between nationalists and the Communist Party leadership. Two political forces crafted and shaped Georgia's reality and future: their interactions, decisions, demands and declarations had far reaching ramifications for then republic of the USSR. Contrary to Barry Posen's argument that a security dilemma exists/existed in the South Caucasus (see Lit. Rev.), this chapter has outlined the nationalistic discourses and narratives that governed the attitude of emerging political elites toward minorities. At a time of rising nationalism, the elites veered away from the wider intelligentsia and created an exclusive group that aimed to build an ethnicity-based state.¹¹³ Subsequently, the significance of local agents has to be recognized to understand the architecture of the conflict. Notwithstanding geopolitical challenges and security problems, political actors on the ground were the most active and important decision makers who predisposed the violent outcome of a legal misunderstanding. In the beginning the South Ossetian issue was “a war of laws” (Cornell, 2002: 266) that was improperly

¹¹³ Gamsakhurdia managed to create a group of loyal followers. They constructed a discourse that marginalized writers, actors and filmmakers who refused to promote Georgian nationalism (see Kaufman p.112). This video recording of one of the discussions in 1989 demonstrates Gamsakhurdia's stance and approach to 'enemies' of Georgian independence <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7v6zHKQ3bc>

managed by the Communist government in Tbilisi, yet later it became a roadmap of the policies that Georgian authorities in Tbilisi were proposing to non-Georgians.

Speech acts like 'Georgia for the Georgians', 'Long live Georgian independence', 'Let blood flow' and 'To terror we will reply with terror' had done more damage than perhaps the entire Communist regime during its seventy-year rule. Such slogans accentuated the destructive institutional memories and historic narratives that had created and incubated during the Communist regime. In other words, the above-mentioned speech acts revived the fundamental paradigms that helped the Communist regime to impose control for more than seventy years. They explain how a particular process produced a hostile outcome (see ch. 3) and securitized all non-Georgians. They set the semantic rules of conflict and shaped the gestures and re-actions of participating actors (see ch. 3). As already noted in the Chapter 3, discourse is a product of the social conditions of production as well as interpretation. By referring to and analysing the texts and speeches of the period, one can see the connection between the texts and processes that are defined by social conditions, but at the same time clarify the situational context of the discourse (Fairclough, 2001: 21). Norman Fairclough argues that discourse changes due to the changing relationships of power at the level of social institution or of the society (2001: 25). This section outlines the speeches and texts that demonstrate the changes of balance of power across social institutions and the society as a whole as a result of political transformations in the USSR. Introducing the details of texts show how the political agents assigned and interpreted content and demonstrated the tendency of amending the truth as it was convenient for their goal (see Balzacq ch.3). By uttering performatives using artefacts, historic narratives and emotions, they co-

constructed the securitization process as they prompted audience to believe new truths about history and ethnicity. Securitization through the discourse helped them to design a network of feeling, thoughts and assumptions that certain citizens of a republic were second-class and/or represented a threat to national interest and independence. Such approach to the security amassed public support and dehumanized the “other” as it created a mental image of an enemy who was wishing to annihilate Georgian nation. As this research seeks to assign explanatory power to the discourses of the time, the forgoing paragraphs offer extracts from the texts and speeches as well as ideas that prepared the soil for wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Gamsakhurdia’s speech about the origin and the holy mission of the Georgian people was part of his identity politics and nationalist vision. He designed an ideology based on mythology, Christianity and Georgian literature. Gamsakhurdia developed the theory during the 1980s to mobilize the nation against Communism, using sacred texts and biblical episodes. Gustave Le Bon’s theory about the psychological crowd applies to Georgia at that time (2001: 14). Gamsakhurdia had a charismatic approach to politics. His family background and political beliefs gained him supporters and many Georgians thought that Zviad (his first name was a brand) represented a knight with a mission to save Georgia. In his extensive speech about the holy duty of the Georgian nation and language, Gamsakhurdia argued that at the time of the Second Coming, Georgians would have a special role and that the judgment was to be held in Georgian language (see Smith et al., 1998: 178, Coppieters, 2002: 106) (1990).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Gamsakhurdia’s address, Full text, <http://saunje.ge/index.php?id=1470&lang=ka> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]. One must note that he cites Ioane Zosime, *Praise and Glorification of the Georgian Language*, who argues that the last judgment will be held in Georgian. For more details see Smith et al. 1998 p. 181.

Gamsakhurdia cites Niko Marr and Wilhelm von Humboldt to argue that Georgian, or, more precisely, proto-Georgian or Japhetic languages, are root languages and that every language originates from it by process of differentiation (see Smith et al., 1998: 179).¹¹⁵ Smith et al argue that, by mentioning the messianic mission, Gamsakhurdia created the myth for salvation of the language and therefore for the nation (1998: 179). He was considered to be a great patriot of Georgia, and people followed him. His vision of the Georgian language and nation as “humiliated and pushed into obscurity” helped his nationalistic discourse to flourish and gain more supporters (Smith et al., 1998: 182). In the Soviet Union, Georgian history was distorted, and most Georgian citizens did not know much about the past of the country so Gamsakhurdia exploited his scholarly authority and was able to inflame nationalistic sentiments. His *Round Table* propagated patriotism, freedom and democracy, but blended them together with virulent nationalism.

The narratives and discourses promoted by Gamsakhurdia and his supporters have immensely influenced the outcome of struggle between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. In the above quoted speech, he openly talked about Georgians as the ancient nation and all other minorities “as guests” (1990). Because of his popularity Ossetians feared for future. Both parties argued that they were right in the dispute, both sides had citations from books of history about the entitlement to Samachablo or South Ossetia. They were sure that their position was just and legal and the battles of legality and justice ended up in a military clash on the outskirts of Tskhinvali.

¹¹⁵ Gamsakhurdia’s address, Full text, <http://saunje.ge/index.php?id=1470&lang=ka> [Last Accessed: 29 July 2018]

The Georgian leader (Gamsakhurdia) attempted to ignore the actual state of affairs, and one interview that he gave demonstrates well the attitude of the Georgian leadership toward the Ossetian issue:

"There is no 'Ossetian side'," - he told *Sobesednik* - "The other side is Gorbachev, Nishanov [Chairman of the House of Nationalities in the USSR Supreme Soviet], and Moscow. They are waging war on us with Soviet troops. And in this battle, they are using gangs of Ossetian Communist extremists. This is a punitive operation by Moscow conducted -- and I state this with full responsibility -- by Nishanov and Kryuchkov [KGB Chairman], using the helicopter and missile regiments deployed in Tskhinvali [South Ossetian capital]. We have set up a display at our MVD [Georgia's Interior Ministry] showing Soviet missiles confiscated from the extremists. They are using them against our population, who are armed only with hunting rifles (1991: 7)."

This quote from his interview shows the attempt of securitization. His speech acts are almost a declaration of war. In his discourse, the Ossetians are "extremists", i.e. a group who can be considered as an exception in Schmittian terms.

Gamsakhurdia downgraded the Ossetian party to "gangs" that were used by Gorbachev to fight Georgia. The Georgian leader wished to demonstrate that there was no "Ossetian side" that was unhappy with Georgia's policies, rather it was a staged conflict. He described one South Ossetian leader, Torez Kulumbekov, as a "terrorist leader" (1991: 7). In the same interview, Gamsakhurdia argued that Kulumbekov was secretly connected to the authorities in Moscow who were trying to save the USSR (7). He also noted that the conflict accelerated anti-Ossetian sentiments in Tbilisi, which he tried to prevent (7). Almost every word said to

Sobesednik was a powerful performative aimed at outlawing the Ossetian people and boosting mutual hatred between people. If Kulumbekov was a “terrorist” then he represented the group that hailed terrorism, which was rather inaccurate depiction of the reality. By using modifiers like “gang” and “terrorist”, and at the same time accusing Ossetians of being in an alliance with Russia and “waging war”, Gamsakhurdia performs speech acts that securitize the Ossetians and Russians simultaneously. He constantly tries to create or signify existential threats in order to be able to break the rules (see Balzacq ch.3). He created certain principles (see Tiechmann, 1997) that were used to measure the factors of power that ordered the hierarchy of things that were important (see ch.3). In other words, he manufactured the consent of the public through creating a new regime of truth.

General Tsagolov proposed a Moscow backed plan that implied restoration of a status quo. He told the *Sobesednik*: “The Ossetians should return to their regional structures [South Ossetia has proclaimed itself a Soviet Republic within the USSR] and reaffirm that the region belongs within Georgia, while Georgia should invalidate the scrapping of [South Ossetia's] autonomy and lift the blockade” (1991: 7). However, Gamsakhurdia did not agree with the plan, as he thought granting “illegal” autonomy to Tskhinvali could not stop the bloodshed (7). He referred to the illegal annexation of Georgia in 1921 by the Russian Red Army, and the consequent status of territories, in his view, was deemed to be unlawful. Apparently, most of the nationalist groups did not have a clear understanding of the legal ambiguity that their speeches and ideas were supporting.¹¹⁶ They were convinced that it was essential to

¹¹⁶ A private talk with the one of the leaders of the nationalists in Tbilisi, July 2013

“fight for independence”, and that other “details” were irrelevant.¹¹⁷ Yet labelling the plan as “illegal” raised more disputes. In this case, defining the plan as “illegal” was a speech act that outlawed the possibility of negotiations.

Gamsakhurdia was outspoken about his admiration of the principles of the French Revolution, particularly the points that prioritised ethnicity and identity. During a meeting with foreign reporters he said: “Georgia's Ossetians are unwanted “guests” who should “go back” to North Ossetia” (Brooke, 1991). The article cites his attitude to the legality of the autonomous status of South Ossetia, with Gamsakhurdia claiming that it was obtained by Ossetians as an appreciation for supporting the Bolsheviks in Georgia in 1920s (Brooke, 1991).

Georgia was intended for Georgians, and minorities were excluded from the future post-Soviet project of the nation-state. In an interview to the Russian newspaper, *Sobesednik*, Gamsakhurdia explained that the allegations that he was campaigning for “Georgia for the Georgians” were “total lies”. However, he elucidated, “Georgia, being in a catastrophic demographic predicament, cannot grant citizenship to all. In any country foreigners, *hostile* to the state are denied citizenship.” (1991: 7), Gamsakhurdia’s narrative demonstrates that he was in favour of the selection and limitation of “foreigners”. Note also his use of the modifier “hostile”, which specifically securitizes minorities. Such views were destroying the multicultural legacy of Georgia, but Gamsakhurdia was able to gather enough supporters, and the choice was made in favour of nationalism. As Thomas Goltz puts, it he did all the right things at the right time, including becoming a member of the Helsinki Human Rights Committee, and was an intellectual who translated European

¹¹⁷ A private talk with the one of the leaders of the nationalists in Tbilisi, July 2013

books (2009: 5). Perhaps this secured him support along, with promoting the policy “*Georgia First*”, which pleased ethnic entrepreneurs but alienated everyone else in Georgia and abroad (Goltz, 2009: 6). However, Stephen Jones observes that Gamsakhurdia’s period was more than just “nationalism”, as the leader believed in a “semi-mythological” and “racially pure” Georgia, which helped him to appeal to nostalgic Georgians who yearned for “the innocence of pre-Soviet times” (2013: 52). By enticing the “little man” who had missed out on privileges and idealistic youth, he reflected “Georgia’s crisis of modernity” (Jones, 2013: 52-53). His language and its semantics appealed to those who lost out, saw a truncation of opportunities and had no access to power. They felt bewilderment and perceived a Messianic figure in Gamsakhurdia.

Christina Teichmann points to attempts by Gamsakhurdia to control political conflicts *linguistically* (1997: 248), as she argues that a particular context defined the utterances of politicians (1997: 235). In an analysis of Gamsakhurdia’s definition of democracy, she emphasizes his ability to achieve acceptance by using a “triad of speech acts” which Tiechmann calls his “threats-demand-invoke” tactics (1997: 244). He always managed to present potential choices as if they were “objectively constrained” by external actors or forces (Tiechmann, 1997: 247). He referred to the securitization of issues when facing disputes with the opposition, or when addressing inter-ethnic relations. This was a case where ethnography became a tool based on wrong assumptions. As Ernest Renan noted, ethnography was “an interesting science” but its political application was dangerous (1990). The fluctuations in the scientific knowledge define the limits of states and some patriots need to be told that they were wrong (Renan, 1990). Gamsakhurdia employed historic and ethnographic

materials to argue that the Georgian nation had a holy mission and deserved a special status. Accordingly, the minorities had to comply with the norms and rules offered by the *titular* group.

On the other side of the barricade, his rhetoric and hyper-nationalism caused anti-Georgian sentiments. The same newspaper report contains the story of a two and a half-year-old girl who wished to get a “machine gun” from her father to murder Georgians (Brooke, 1991). Children who watched the suffering in Tskhinvali and heard the panicked conversations of their parents were frightened. Through word of mouth and the media, the aggressive discourse was spreading fast, instilling prejudice against certain groups and ethnic minorities. In Soviet Georgia, there were just two TV channels and the news service were censored by the government. Hence, unlike Yugoslavia TV broadcast, it was less important for the distribution of information. After Gamsakhurdia’s accession to power, the TV channel was completely controlled by a few MPs, and mostly broadcast from the bunker under the Parliament building in central Tbilisi. Newspapers became “instruments of specific interests” and served “sectionalist propaganda” (Snyder, 2000: 125) — mostly nationalistic in nature. The preponderant narrative attacked the centuries-old links between communities that formed and shaped Georgia and Georgianess. Nationalists could not forge a compromise, on the contrary they continued to engage in a hostile discourse that did bring victory to nationalists, yet left more vanquished, as well as lost opportunities and decades of conflict and instability.

For a country and society suppressed under the Communist ideology for seventy years and experiencing epistemic violence, hyper-nationalism was a disastrous choice. Gamsakhurdia’s rule was characterised by a plethora of

restrictions and bans. His every speech and declaration were full of extremism and intolerance to “others”, i.e. non-ethnic Georgians, — or “guests”, as he liked to label them. Some of his allies even used the adjective “ungrateful” as a prefix to the word “guest”. In other words, non-Georgians were “ungrateful guests” without a place in an independent Georgia. Georgia was transformed into a martyr nation, which suffered for the sake of the interests of “these ungrateful guests”.¹¹⁸ As the *New York Times* reported, Gamsakhurdia’s campaign, “Georgia for Georgians”, discouraged mixed marriages, “where its citizenship would be restricted to people who could prove residence prior to Russia’s annexation of 1801, and where property rights would be limited to people who voted for national independence in a referendum in April” (Brooke, 1991). Another aspect of the policy was the compulsory test of Georgian language and literature for admission to higher education, which became the law in August 1989 (Coppieters, 2002: 98). The law revived memories of Stalin’s purges, as knowledge of Georgian was almost non-existent in Abkhazia (Coppieters, 2002: 98).

Another of Gamsakhurdia’s addresses was on 26 May 1989 — his speech begins with ovations and his words are “Georgia’s sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, Georgians [Georgianno] Christ is Risen!”, and pronouncing that “God is with us”. He refers to the past of Georgia and argues that the very existence of Georgia is the proof that God has been and will continue to be with “us” (the Georgians) (Geoika, 2009). His mention of “holy blood” to support the destruction of the biggest empire of darkness is significant (Geoika, 2009). He says that the blood of those who died on 9 April had joined those one hundred thousand Georgian martyrs and that

¹¹⁸ This was a widespread discourse propagated on TV and by the word of mouth

those martyrs and their blood will help Georgia, and that being a martyr nation is the path allocated to the Georgian nation. “A road to martyrdom, a road of Christ”, he insists. His entire speech is aimed at depicting Georgia as a part of the sacral world, a nation belonging to heaven. He ends by saying “Hail to independent, Christian Georgia!”, a sentence which in turn was aimed to alienate all non-Christian residents, including ethnic Georgians who were either Muslim or Catholic.

Gamsakhurdia uses a metaphor (See Balzacq Chapter 3), compares Georgia to Christ and creates a powerful image of sacred Georgia. He also makes reference to “holy blood”, bringing a “rhetoric of blood” (Herzfield, 1997: 83). According to Herzfield, blood has a long history in the Indo-European and Semitic cultures and has been a symbol of social inclusiveness (1997: 84). As Ricoeur puts it, metaphor governs naming and it substitutes the missing or absent word (1976: 47-48). By comparing Georgia to Christ, his intentional meaning prepares the public to accept bloodshed. He substitutes the possibility of death with “a road of Christ” and “a road to martyrdom”. It signifies that people had to get ready for fatal outcomes. Another aspect that makes this metaphor important is the reference to a “common fate”, which implies enhancement of prominence and solidarity among the members of a group (Armstrong, 1982: 9). Gamsakhurdia legitimizes the symbolic aspects that are more important than material ones in forging identity (1982: 9). In other words, the Georgian nationalist leader uses several mobilizing symbols to define a special identity. By referring to “holy blood”, he links human agency to symbols and to ancestors (Smith, 2015: 168). Hence the idea of a “rhetoric of blood” serves as a mythomoteur, which aims to link the present to past (see ch. 2).

Gamsakhurdia and his supporters fractured the vulnerable fabric of Georgian society just as it was in search of a new post-Soviet identity. By 1991, it was evident that the man who epitomized the anti-Soviet struggle for many in the 1980s was failing to govern Georgia. He was heavily dependent on radical discourse, referring to enemies and to agents of Moscow. He blocked access to the media for the opposition groups and imposed strict censorship (Forsyth, 2013: 681).

When a leader of a national movement, who later became a president, sanctions intolerance toward non-Georgians and makes it a cornerstone of the official policy, it produces a snowball effect. Carroll Bogert reports about street meetings where people exchanged rumours regarding the situation in Abkhazia, telling one another that allegedly 70 Georgians were killed in Abkhazia, calling the situation intolerable (1989). Gamsakhurdia labelled Abkhaz as “terrorists” and “agents of Moscow” who were instructed to slaughter local Georgians (Bogert, 1989). Another controversial statement was made by then-commander of the Georgian forces in Abkhazia, Colonel (later to be made a general) Giorgi Karkarashvili, who, in a televised address, warned the Abkhaz that he was ready to sacrifice 100,000 Georgians to annihilate 97,000 Abkhaz (entire population), and he threatened that the Abkhaz people could be left without descendants (in Cheterian, 2008: 195).¹¹⁹ This was perhaps one of the most powerful speech acts of the time, and it worsened Abkhaz-Georgian relations. One can make a claim that Karkarashvili’s threats epitomized the social conditions that produced that performative. It demonstrated how power was shifting toward radicals. However, despite this harsh

¹¹⁹ Karkarashvili, G. 1992. Address to Abkhaz, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzvtaZIMy98> [Accessed: September 2016]

rhetoric, Georgians did not intend to massacre the Abkhaz and destroy the nation (Cheterian, 2008: 196). Nodia attempts to explain Karkarashvili's declaration and indicates that the statement implied that "it was silly" of the Abkhaz side to expose their youth to danger, as Georgia would never give up Abkhazia and that in the end Karkarashvili was expressing his own views (Nodia, 1997: 10). Cheterian interprets those words as warnings and not as threats, yet he notes that Abkhaz psychology was too traumatized by the memories of the nineteenth century to ignore them altogether (2008: 196).

6.11. How does "We" become the "Other"?

One must admit that the Georgian Communist Government along with nationalist parties in a matter of months made all the wrong decision, emphasized negative institutional and historic memory, and "aced" in alienating all non-ethnic Georgians. Their appeals were often based on exaggerations and self-interests but helped them to persuade public (Snyder, 2000: 53-54). They acted either in concert or separately, yet they secured chaos and military clashes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

As argued in chapter 3, crises in Georgia in the late 1980s were the products of the securitization of ethnicity, i.e. minor difference. Empirical evidence presented in this chapter demonstrated how nationalist leaders constructed a discursive wall and fractured society, blocking channels of communication and negotiation. The descriptive sections provided evidence of the power of performative utterances that were used by leaders for the mobilization of support. Spoken words transformed social reality and created mental images of enemies out of the neighbours. The sections offer a "snap-shot" of the dominant public narrative that inflamed emotions

and assembled all those artefacts, stereotypes and thoughts which were necessary to prove the critical vulnerability of a referent object (Balzacq, 2011b: 2). The chapter shows how discursive politics worked as it created dilemmas out of security. They helped to dehumanize the Abkhaz and Ossetians, and prepared the public to fight the war. Referring back to Sartori's conceptual framework, one can argue that the conflicts need to be approached with more-or-less measurements because during a tectonic political shift, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, one is unlikely to find one or even two either-or answers to the causations of the escalation and later interventions. For this study it is central to show what security, history, and in this case Georgianess, meant and what they meant in terms of the political context assigned to them.

With regard to Abkhazia, Coppieters asserts that the government of Georgia was following an order to arrange the police operation in Sokhumi and it was legal. He offers an analysis of intentions that drove the Presidium to issue the order (Coppieters, 2003: 196). Coppieters interprets the decision as follows: primarily the authorities thought that the disruption on the railway¹²⁰ was a threat to the new government of Georgia; the government had to crush the supporters of the former president Gamsakhurdia (Coppieters, 2003: 196). Simultaneously, the new government was unable to deal with the growing escalation of the conflict between Georgian and Abkhaz communities in Abkhazia as they started to arm [themselves?], and military presence in Abkhazia was a chance to decide the issue of Abkhazia "once and for all"; and the fourth point was the nationalistic stance demonstrated by the

¹²⁰ The official reason of an armed operation was to open the railway between Tbilisi and Moscow which was blocked, and which halted trade between Georgia and Russia.

government of Gamsakhurdia, and, in light of his rhetoric, the new government did not wish to seem “less patriotic” (Coppieters, 2003: 196). If Coppieters’s assumption is right, then it proves the argument that the discourse of “patriotism” was to blame for utterly incompetent decision. In doing so, the government demonstrated that it brought in the divisive narrative and further expanded the space for verbal aggression.

According to the Georgians’ own interpretation of the events, they had the “right intention”, but the number of sources and evidence does not allow Coppieters to accept the justification of actions. Instead, he argues that there is no objective just cause and subjectively right intention (2003: 196). Additionally, Coppieters questions the legitimacy of the Presidium of the State Council to wage war, as the Council was not elected but established by paramilitary leaders after an armed coup against Gamsakhurdia (Coppieters, 2003: 197). Overall, the unelected Council had to deal with already tense relations and periodic skirmishes between Georgians and Abkhaz that were mostly triggered because of prevailing nationalist discourse.

It is important to remember that Georgians had always feared that Abkhazia would become a pressure point for the Moscow government in relation to independent Georgia (Carrère d'Encausse, 1993: 77). Abkhazia was a prosperous republic with a higher rate of growth per capita income, and a disproportionate share of the budget, plus larger than average number of publications in its native language (Ozhiganov, 1997: 352). That is the reason Georgians always thought that Russians would like to keep the province for themselves. Perhaps that is why it was so traumatic to see the Abkhaz on the “Russian side” in the aftermath of the USSR collapse.

Despite such fears, Georgians admitted and welcomed the hostile discourse against the Abkhaz. Ozhiganov emphasizes and partially shares the viewpoint expressed by Svetlana Chervonnaya, regarding the role of press, media, ethnologists and political scientists who “aggravated interethnic tensions” and made Georgian nationalism a weapon with which to terrorize minorities (Ozhiganov, 1997: 352). By advocating divisions, the intelligentsia assigned a “quality of aggression” to nationalism and underlined its negative aspects (Billig, 1995: 56).

6.12. Summary

By describing and analysing the discourses that had performed acts of securitization in Georgia in the 1980s, this chapter has presented the empirical evidence of performatives and addressed their consequences. It responds to the causal mechanism that pertain to the question of the theory — *who does securitization* and *what securitization does* — the finding makes them mutually supportive, because due to these causal mechanisms one can see how those who possess certain interests securitize (or de-securitize) any given case (Wæver, 2011: 469). One can see how chains of actions unfolded and helped the creation of an exclusive society that was hostile toward non-Georgians or to the people who did not affiliate themselves to the idea of *Georgianess* offered by the national movement.

The outline of the narratives that objectified certain ethnic groups shows how the securitization was conducted, yet other real threats (e.g. an economic collapse) were not labelled as issues of immediate security (Wæver, 2011: 472). The performatives emphasized in this chapter demonstrate how the national movement and members of intelligentsia directed public opinion, telling the public “what to

think” about the challenges of the time (Vultee, 2011: 80). Maxims like 'Georgia for the Georgians', 'Long live Georgian independence', 'Let blood flow', and 'To terror we will reply with terror' consolidated most of the negative aspects of history and Soviet ethno-nationalism that had existed in the collective memory of the republic. Such words created a very dangerous “fusion of national security with national identity” (Vultee, 2011: 80). People were told that they risked losing their identity and perhaps would be unable to live as themselves (Wæver in Vultee, 2011: 81).

The extracts from speeches and statements, as well as disenfranchising decisions show how the political entrepreneurs on all sides of the disputes “selected” securitizing stories and emotions that activated certain conditions (presumably threatening) and concealed other dimensions of the issue (Balzacq, 2005: 182). These trends enable one to say that security is a symbol “involved in the mediation of the symbolic aspect of security” and is an elucidation that emphasizes specific features of natural or social development thus influencing the public and their action (Balzacq, 2005: 183).

Anti-Ossetian and anti-Abkhaz sentiments were accepted because they were given “authorization” by the narratives of political actors or intelligentsia who were empowered to speak (Balzacq, 2011b: 8). Because those people had a particular authority their words and evaluations of ethnic difference were regarded as important and became securitized. The current findings unravel the process in which the securitizing actors in Tbilisi, Sokhumi and Tskhinvali as well as in Moscow induced the audience to accept their interpretation of the conflict. Gamsakhurdia’s and Kostava’s nationalist stance paved the way to emergence of hostile sentiments toward Georgians across Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Stories were circulated that

were selected for the wider discourse about the post-Soviet status of the autonomous entities. They were alienating and divisive, bringing almost all negative memories to the surface, and at the same time assuring the public that this was the democratic Georgia they wished to build. Performatives including “exterminate”, “holy blood”, “terrorists” or “agents of Moscow” convinced people to *other* their compatriots. In this case the context of securitization and power status of nationalists had additional leverage, as the audience thought that the national movement was delivering on the independence of Georgia. Here the “linguistic competence” (Balzacq, 2011b: 25) was assigned to the leaders of the national movement as they had an unchecked authority to articulate and control the sequence of statements and performatives. Thus, one can see how the “dispositional concept” of power, i.e. an ability to either directly or indirectly produce an effect on the public, secured full support in Georgia proper (Luke in Balzacq, 2011b: 26).

Finally, one could argue that the discourse did make a difference, as was mentioned in chapter 1, and Adjara was not included in the securitizing discourse which could explain why religious difference there did not escalate into an armed confrontation (see Chapter 1). Besides, there is an apt difference between the discourse of Georgian intellectuals in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth. When Adjara returned to Georgia, Ilia Chavchavadze wrote the following: “the Berlin treaty has done one tremendous good deed for us [...]. Our brothers in blood, the nest of our heroes, the cradle of our civilization, our ancient Georgia, were united to us” (quoted in Pelkmans, 2006: 98). Whereas the nationalists and their supporters in the twentieth century ‘othered’ Abkhaz and Ossetians branding them as ‘newcomers’ and ‘guests’.

7. Chapter Seven

Conclusions and Summary of Findings

7.1. Introduction: What is at stake?

Every research project is assessed on the merits of its contribution to the relevant sciences. Hence this thesis adds voice to studies of the discursive dimensions of the conflicts and the impact of the main political narratives. It examines cases in the South Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia) in the 1980s and early 1990s. By examining discourses, the study explains the operationalization of historical and political narrative.

What did the words, the speech acts, denote in the context of securitization? How has the political discourse influenced the interpretation of ethnic differences and securitized them? Following the footsteps of this analysis, one can see that political entrepreneurs inflicted hatred and resentment across the communities. Their words and speeches engendered divisions and differences which brought the countries to the brink. These findings seek to bring to the surface the links between the discourse and the war, between the securitization of ethnic differences and the armed conflicts. It does not offer any judgements about the validity of historic narratives that were used in the process of securitization, yet it outlines their significance in the escalation of events. To refer to Foucault's argument, discourse is not just a manifestation, but an object of desire; it not only translates struggles and systems of domination, but is a channel for which and by which there is a struggle — it is a power which can be captured and used (1981: 52-53). Our aim here has been

to delve below the divisions and reassess the speech acts and performatives that led toward the inter-ethnic wars.

This section consolidates the findings and assumptions made across my study. It refocuses on the question in the introduction to this thesis, as to whether ethnic difference was a driving force behind the armed escalation. Referring back to Sartori's concept of the more-or-less, one could conclude that narratives and discourses about history and symbols served as powerful instruments for the mobilization of public opinion. They were not a single causation, yet the speech acts and performatives that dominated the public space had an enormous impact on the perception of conflicts on all sides of disputes.

7.2. Findings

Following from the account of the discontents across the South Caucasus, one can solidify the argument against nationalism. When populists and demagogues who strive for influence dominate the public discourse and power, nationalism is a mere tool for achieving their goals. The parties and protagonists could not withstand the primordialist trap that forced them to come to a singular conclusion without focusing on multilateral processes and interactions. As my findings show, primordialism is not a rock-solid dictum, rather it was weaponized by fears, projections and interests which were depicted as maxims. All accounts structured around the ethnic identity provide built-in assumptions that eventually ask who is right or wrong, making the question meaningless. It is better to look for a smoking gun in the hands of every single actor and their performatives.

After laying out the methodology, the thesis addresses Soviet ethno-nationalism as it influenced the discourse of independence. Yet at the same time, it depicts that references to the past were choices of individual actors, who mostly condemned the USSR and the Communist system. The theory of securitization offers analytical dividends that allow us to broaden the research of the South Caucasus. By combining social science theories and empirical data the study observes the language of controversies during the 1980s and early 1990s. The empirical chapters explain the ideas that shaped the discourse of conflicts, showing how political protagonists modelled their speeches and public appeals. These chapters provide the data to answer the research question and reveal the instruments of securitization.

If there is anything these findings generalize, it is how political discourse forms and shapes social reality and creates threats. My findings show how calling out the common sources of hardships provide the tools to overcome them. This project features the sentiments, dogmas and passions that divided society and points to short-sightedness that confounded visions of independence.

Words do possess performative power as they are the primary point of this research project. They are the most important issues in the study of conflicts. Words and utterances are forms of communication that reveal the very fabric of thoughts. When we launch a closer examination of the paradigms that organise the enmity then there is a hope of preventing the worst atrocities against humanity. It can also equip us against demagoguery and zealotry, which is in itself a form of securitization of public discourse.

7.3. Main aspects of the study

These case studies tell us a qualitatively different story about the political background of the wars. It demonstrates how securitization was conducted and how the ethnic difference became a weapon of warfare. This thesis has two original aspects: it applies the securitization theory to the non-democratic orders and demonstrates how the concept explains the perceptions of the post-Soviet political actors; and secondly it examines the South Caucasus through the social-constructivist prism and argues that the actors mutually constituted the crisis around constitutional dilemmas and translated them into violent conflicts.

By emphasizing the importance of referent objects, securitizing actors and the context that was employed to conduct securitization, can outline the correlation between conflicts and speech. By distancing itself from a geopolitical view of the conflicts, this study revisited the adjectives and modifiers that predated the turmoil. These depict the lines of differentiation that epitomized otherness and the speech acts where history commanded the meaning of discourse. The thesis shows how the communities fell victims to extremism and demagoguery.

The aim of this thesis was to apply securitization theory to the context and development of the three conflicts in the South Caucasus, and to explore the rules and practices that defined the dispute and how differences were produced and reproduced by the discourse. It has encapsulated trends that were significant in the region during the 1980s and early 1990s. First, it showed the discursive power of nationalist ideas to be overarching. Secondly, one can observe the process of othering that engulfed the three republics of the USSR.

As already mentioned, security serves political goals in “various contexts”, and scientists should examine as many cases as possible (see Vuori ch. 1). Securitization considers practices, artefacts, metaphors, policy tools, images and stereotypes that contextually mobilise the audience (ch. 3). It is a theory that looks for power in communications between political actors and a community. This theory seeks to find the imprint of power in daily relations as it studies the ways that are used to assign categories to political aims. Securitization theory goes into the depth of the problem and helps to define blurred lines between acceptable and unacceptable conduct, between a friend and an enemy, and between us and them. It helps to study actors who preach and teach intolerance as they create vulnerabilities and then exploit them.

When assessing the conflicts, one must remember that the language has meaning as it creates symbolic content. In other words, securitization is produced through communication when enunciators claim legitimacy. By adhering to particular trends, political discourse creates the ‘law’ of existence of hostile political statements (ch. 3). One can see how political actors defined and shaped the language and made exceptions acceptable. Upon the examination it is striking what the domain of discourse was, how the social memory was affected and, in certain cases, censored or repressed, and how history was transmuted to fit the appropriate discourse and impose control on narrative.

By addressing the discourse as a “monument” these findings demonstrate how history and ethnic belonging became monuments that were worshipped. These three cases emphasise the contexts that were accentuated in the South Caucasus and add value to the overall studies of securitization.

This thesis thus demonstrated how speech acts and performatives do things by allocating 'relevant' context to the content and meaning of issues. By examining speeches and decisions, one could see how the burden of interpretation of certain concepts or notions lies with individuals rather than structures like geopolitics. As the empirical data proves, the politics of enmity is a sum of individual choices of those who are authorized to speak in the name of power or possess the power. It also shows how the failure to communicate power fails the governments. By embarking on speculations around the security of nation and importance of historic justice the political entrepreneurs securitized political language but failed to provide security. In other words, if one generalizes the findings, political actors refer to platitudes which then unleash the forces they are unable of control. Therefore, securitization becomes a tool of destruction, resulting in more losers than victors.

There was an ethnic 'wrapping' for the crisis, but the real reason was the legal and political discontent between the centre and the periphery. The defining trait of the conflicts was the politicized image of the dissent. To be more specific, virulent nationalism was something manufactured and created by political actors who emphasized memories and narratives founded on hostility and negative experiences. The analysis and materials elucidated in this project offer footage and other empirical data that demonstrate the radicalism of parties. Indeed, every case of securitization is "a historical process" that takes place between preceding set of events and their subsequent impact on communication of the time, that help to reinforce repercussions of securitization (Balzacq, 2011b: 14). In other words, the investigation of the cases shows what the "doing was" at the point of escalation (see Veine ch. 2).

Contradictions over the status and legal jurisdiction of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh or South Ossetia were mainly wars of adjectives. New political actors wished to establish their own modifiers of autonomy and power distribution. Borrowing from Foucault, the explanation of the conflicts should not be researched from either strategic or primordial concepts, nor should it focus on the timeline of events, but it should instead be a descriptive analysis of the transformations that occurred throughout (Foucault, 1991b: 58). Consequently, any description of the shifts in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods are best manifested in the discourses that shaped and reshaped the communities and republics of a former giant state.

As this analysis has demonstrated, nationalistic and historic narratives were eroded by the Soviet nationalities policies and then securitized by nationalists and freedom fighters. By the end of the twentieth century there was a hybrid confluence of two ideologies that shaped the political order of post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. By combining the modified past offered by the Bolshevik leaders in the 1920s, nationalists were unable to bring positive change. Soviet historiography was exceptionally politicized, hence the involvement of history in the narratives of mobilization that determined the significance of the old ideology they wished to topple. The Soviet doctrine became an ideological powerhouse of new political elites. By opting to instrumentalize history as a unifying tool, the nationalists divided the very communities they meant to unite.

It is essential to address these conflicts as a single crisis, or three distinct shades of one complexity. As previous chapters explain, the local actors in the Soviet republics were politicized and radicalized during the 1980s. In the time of loud

declarations forbidden for decades, it was easy to bargain with truth or with the idea of whether it existed at all.

7.4. Local narratives

In light of the destruction of the Soviet Union and the subsequent challenges, the discourses and narratives about ethnical purity and a sacred mission of particular groups did not help disputes. Rather, they strengthened in-group solidarity among those who were deemed to be out-groups.

It could be said that the local political narratives and discourses played the biggest role in escalation of the conflicts in the South Caucasus. Those narratives created an ethnic limbo that dominated the peace talks and negotiations. Their content implicitly forced communities and governments to choose a focal point and address every problem in the scope of ethnic belonging. The nationalists' words gave the power to ethnos.

The broad narrative of "Georgia for Georgians" was a demonstration of ultra-nationalism that harmed Georgia as a state and Georgia as a society. The first victim of nationalism promoted by Gamsakhurdia was the South Ossetian autonomy. In the case of South Ossetia, Georgian nationalists triggered enmity artificially.

As Ozhiganov argues, the idea of "historic enmity" was instilled into the consciousness of the Georgian people by the nationalist leaders and their followers, who promoted the idea of Georgians as a "host nation" and all others as "guests" (1997: 343). Olga Vasileva notes that the conflict in Abkhazia was triggered by the

belief of Georgians that they had a “historic past” which stipulated that Georgia would flourish as a free and united nation in the future, manifested in the maxim widely quoted by the nationalists that there was “a historic right of Georgians to Georgian lands”, and that “guests” should be accustomed to their “second-class” position in that new Georgia (in Ozhiganov, 1997: 343).

Intellectuals in Tbilisi were divided as they enhanced the importance of negative aspects of the bilateral relations. Georgia was approaching a point of no return from escalation of disputes. As mentioned earlier, there has to be a fertile soil for negative stories, people have to remember certain extracts of history, which then make them susceptible to moral pressure (see Deutsch) — and nationalistically imbued editorials served exactly that cause.

History has a direct link to the narratives and discourses that triggered the escalation. It is not clear who was telling the truth or who was lying, but the end result was tragic. As mentioned in the introduction, Vicken Cheterian blames a distorted interpretation of history and lack of a marketplace of ideas during the Soviet period (2008: 41-42).

As Brubaker defines it, nationalism is “a category of practice” and its understanding requires an exploration of practical issues related to nationalism and its production (see Brubaker, 2003). It is clear how the texts chosen by the nationalists influenced the understanding of nation and nationalism in the post-Soviet South Caucasus. In Armenia a discourse came from Nagorno-Karabakh that emphasized the social and economic problems, but at the same time implicitly depicted Azerbaijanis as enemies and allies of Turkey or, as the findings show, they were defined as “Turks”. Turkey, as mentioned earlier, represents an existential

threat to the Armenian state and the Armenian people. Turkey, as the legal heir of the Ottoman Empire, is considered responsible for the 1915 genocide of Armenians. The nationalists and authors of various letters and appeals knew that by relating Azerbaijanis to Turks they were propagating enmity and hatred. Azerbaijanis were equated with Turks, i.e. sub-humans, who did not deserve either rights or sovereignty. The discourse about secession or the change of jurisdiction of Nagorno-Karabakh is predominantly focused on ethnic identity, on the dichotomy of the “us and them” — Armenian and Turk — who claim to be Azeris and wish to exterminate Armenians (see Aivazian’s letter in Libaridian p.92).

Another culprit was the mass rally in Yerevan that also mobilized the public around an idea of Armenian identity that was under threat from Azerbaijanis. Armenia had to unite and protect its identity against its enemies. Aivazian’s appeal enumerates the issues that were emphasized in the dispute concerning the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh, but few of his points contained any juridical argumentation.

As Laitin and Suny note, ethnic hatreds were very insignificant; instead they place the emphasis on ‘nation-building’, ethnonationalism in the USSR and the rapidly dissolving Soviet Union (see Suny and Laitin, 1999). Historic justice and nationalism were part of the nation-building plans of nationalist politicians. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the theme was apparent during the discussions between Gorbachev and the Armenian nationalists from the Karabakh Committee. Additionally, Kaputikian and Balayan wished to be seen as authorities capable of

talking with Moscow.¹²¹ The records show that Gorbachev insisted on stopping the escalation of differences. Yet, the nationalists had another agenda; they had influence over the crowds in Yerevan who supported their 'just' demands. Public debate was about 'the sides' that the Kremlin allegedly took during the dispute. From the beginning there was a dividing line: that the supreme government supported the 'out-group' — i.e. Azerbaijanis — and that Armenians were suppressed in the debate. Such perceptions produced a snowball effect and helped to rally people around the idea of the reconstruction of historic Armenia that had to start from Nagorno-Karabakh. Karabakh became a totem, word, and place that assured the legitimacy of the warmongers.

Sumgait was a result of local discourses that emanated from insecurity and disorientation as well as local political actors who opted for the manipulation of nationalistic sentiments. As my findings show, the simple reference to Azerbaijani refugees triggered the tragedy in Sumgait.

The looming perspective of being second-class citizens of even an independent Georgia was not the most comfortable and beneficial prospect for non-Georgians. They felt threatened by the unwelcoming discourses of Georgians. South Ossetia and Abkhazia had a status that was questioned firstly by nationalists, and later the Communist government of Georgian SSR adopted legislation that further questioned their position in the case of independence from Moscow. Hence, the content of discourse, speech acts, and the language used was of great importance.

¹²¹ The ability to communicate with Moscow was an additional advantage for the popularity and ranking of politicians. Despite aspirations to freedom and sovereignty, the wider public still paid attention to such details, as Moscow and the Kremlin were seen as bridges to the rest of the world.

The politics deliberately selected epithets that served to deepen the rift between communities.

To sum up, the narratives and discourse created a world of ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’, where guests were labelled as ungrateful. The language used to organize the legal dispute over the status of two autonomies largely defined the escalation and securitization of ethnic belonging of Abkhaz and Ossetians. In Armenia, Azerbaijanis were securitized as being Turks, who were enemies of Armenia, while in Azerbaijan, Armenians became enemies as they wished to occupy Azeri lands. Local nationalists created a story built on threats, and, as Balzacq puts it there was an “assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts” were contextually mobilised in order to create the critical vulnerability of the referent object (2011b: 3).

In the end, the leaders of the national movements used knowledge and a historical memory that was filtered twice: first by the Russian empire, and later by the Communist regime. In other words, nationalists used ideas that were bred under the heavy influence of the epistemic filter of two oppressive regimes.

7.5. Performance of security

As mentioned elsewhere, the examination of language and application of the “ethnic shifters” help to reveal the context of the conflicts. Speech acts and performatives that assigned significance to ethnicity also fitted history into the securitization narrative. Thus, analysis of the way in which the discourse circulated, or how form and meaning were connected in particular circumstances, define this study (see ch. 3). Politicians used words that were actions themselves: their modifiers had

“performative” power. Therefore, this study wishes to highlight the importance of political power that “draws boundaries and erects walls” (Searle ch. 3). This research is a distinct interpretation of the controversies of personality, cultural difference, political affiliations and ethnic rights. This is a study of a conflict as a discursive product. Hence it offered an insight into the discursive roots of nationalist grievances that have been pertaining to the power discourse ever since.

This analysis is about the importance of the narrative chosen by those in power or those close to power. One has to acknowledge the significance of their utterances that defined the modes of enmity in the South Caucasus rather than look into geopolitical rivalries. Wittgenstein observes that “the results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. They — these bumps — make us see the value of that discovery” (2009: no: 119). Those bumps that were “performed” by the nationalist leaders help one to uncover trajectories of mobilization. One must admit that the discourse transformed the mode of thinking about identity and who the “others” were. It influenced the conditions of communication. Even today, the parties use the language that had governed their alienation thirty years ago and are unable to change the modifiers of the discontent. The “regime of truth” created by that discourse provides ground for and makes it possible to sustain a system that divides communities and supports “othering”.

7.6. Symbols of otherness

One striking issue that resurfaces in this analysis regards peoples' understanding of their identities and how Georgians imagined themselves vis-à-vis the Abkhaz or Ossetians and how Azerbaijanis and Armenians perceived each other. What was their sense of belonging and what was contested? In other words, the parties vied for a symbolic power that, instead of strengthening newly acquired sovereignty, fragmented and destroyed them.

The question has to be understood as to whether it was about people or symbols and why the symbols had a greater value than human lives. As this thesis has argued the nationalist discourse amended the rules of communication, which in turn radicalized the positions held by parties.

In the approaches of Georgians and Armenians toward the 'other', one can notice the context of victimhood, which provides another powerful speech act that helps the enunciators to forge a new reality. Georgians found existential enemies among the Abkhaz and Ossetians, whereas Armenians and Azerbaijanis erected dividing walls between two nations. The polemics were about the distribution of redress in the post-Soviet political reality and the nationalist leaders turned it into the 'us versus them' dichotomy. It is the political that becomes the most severe and extreme antagonism, and it gains momentum closer to the tipping point of re-grouping activities (Schmitt and Strong, 2007: 29). In other words, one can refer to Schmitt's argument that the "political" creates enemies and increases tensions between the groups, because all political concepts, images and terminology have a polemical meaning as they focus on a specific situation and often disappear like ghosts when the problem fades (2007: 30).

In a certain way, the nationalists hijacked words like nation, patriot, security and history because they changed the language of communication. The entire nationalistic discourse was a type of “cheating” to borrow from Schmitt (2007: 54). They promoted a social order that did not accommodate minority communities. In the end, they employed the very same methods of differentiation as the Communists had done when they used ethno-nationalism as the founding concept of statehood.

This thesis has demonstrated that the political toolbox used by the nationalists was hugely predisposed and influenced by the Soviet vision. In essence, the attempt to build new states was founded on the values of a deteriorating regime that failed.

7.7. Whose freedom and whose justice?

Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian patriots all claimed to act in the name of historic justice and freedom of their consequent countries. Mostly ‘justice’ became a pathetic word that epitomised the banality of the patriots’ demands. By referring to justice, it was easy to look “moral” but in the end it diminished the very value of justice.

By revealing the means used to achieve political goals, one is then better able to demonstrate their relevance to the future (Arendt, 1970: 4). The means — narratives, symbols and discourses — ended up being important because of the content, yet almost futile for building inclusive states. Bearing this in mind, one can see that the political goals of the nationalist movements could not pass the test of relevance. Hence, this study shows how apparently ‘permanent’ problems were

constructed by political actors, and emphasizes the role of agency, rather than blaming structures for the crises in this region.

As history commanded the meaning of the discourse, symbols were weaponized against the people. As one can see in the empirical chapters of this thesis, myths about the great past and symbols of ethnic belonging were allocated much greater importance than human life. The political entrepreneurs engineered the regime of truth that enabled them to influence people to accept securitization of ethnic differences.

If one seeks the logos of war in the South Caucasus, then that word must be 'difference'.

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9. Appendix

This subsidiary list provides the breakdown of the primary sources used in the thesis. It also provides the list of newspaper and magazine articles, news programmes and video footage of interviews, also it contains the list of material that was examined but not used in the final version of the study.

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